

CHRIST
AND HIS AGE

BY DOUGLAS G. BROWNE

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BY

DOUGLAS G. BROWNE

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PREFACE

THIS book sets forth quite simply certain historical and human aspects, too frequently obscured, of an event which the superstition and study of centuries have clothed (to more minds than will generally be admitted) with many of the unsatisfactory attributes of a myth.

The subject has been treated here in two arbitrary and diverse halves, in some sort symbolic, as the writer hopes, of that profound revolution in the world's future and outlook which everyone admits but which few stop to consider. The first half is purely historical, and is no more than a picturesque compilation—the pickings of other people's brains. The second half is partly biographical and largely imaginative; and it opens with

a chapter which will seem to many extravagantly speculative and even absurd, but which is deliberately written as a protest against the tyranny of conventional ideas, and as a suggestion that we should do better to speculate (if speculate we must) upon natural possibilities than upon the theological interpretations of this or that combination of words. Human imagination, to which the circumstances of Christ's career must always appeal, has been too largely concentrated on its theological aspects: the immense field of speculation has been thronged with partial advocates and scholars armed with microscopes; and the study of the historical and human side of the subject has always been fatally handicapped by other considerations. There have been lives of Christ innumerable; and the scrutiny of his revolution has called forth sufficient love, labour and erudition to have moved mountains: yet as regards himself, his personality, his charm, we stand where we stood 1,900 years ago. Nay, we have retrogressed; for now these things lie half obscured beneath the dust of conflict. The clash of creeds and the

rivalries of scholars have indeed stimulated thought, but it has been the thought of their own kind, not that of the great mass of followers, who have no real conception of what their intellectual leaders are arguing about. These followers will admit, with Maurice of Nassau, that they know not whether predestination be blue or green ; but, like him, they will take one side or the other in the end ; and such facile acquiescence, so far from being the result of stimulated thought, is the negation of any genuine thought at all.

There yet remains a class of individuals, young in spirit and in knowledge, however old in years, who are ignorant but not facile, who have in their hearts not only a love of beauty but the capacity and desire to understand it. While perhaps far greater intellects than theirs are expended in supporting a doctrine or destroying an exegetical fallacy, these enquirers, caring little for doctrines and less for exegesis, are anxious merely to obtain a clear, common-sense view of things, to learn for themselves how the lily grows, to hear in so many words what happened to the historical world 1,900

years ago. They are too often presented with a vague and shadowy picture in which the most shadowy and inexplicable figure is that of Christ himself. Before this they stand bewildered ; they cannot, perhaps, accept the supernatural, but they are offered nothing else ; and while they feel they know less than ever of what they set out to learn, they are perhaps repulsed and even discouraged of any further endeavour by the sad and mysterious figure whom the theologians of nearly two millenniums have gradually evolved out of their dogmatic systems. To such bewildered enquirers, in particular, this little book is offered.

CONTENTS

PART I

THE JEWS AND THE ANCIENT WORLD

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. PREPARING THE STAGE : THE MATERIAL FORCES	I
II. PREPARING THE STAGE : THE INTELLECTUAL FORCES	30
III. THE STAGE SET : PALESTINE IN THE TIME OF CHRIST	45

PART II

CHRIST

I. THE EARLY ENVIRONMENT OF CHRIST	97
II. THE BEAUTY OF THE GOSPEL	134
III. THE BEAUTY OF CHRIST	167
IV. THE LAST DAYS	211
EPILOGUE	230
INDEX	239

Ch. H. H. H.



CHRIST AND HIS AGE

PART I

THE JEWS AND THE ANCIENT WORLD

CHAPTER I

PREPARING THE STAGE: THE MATERIAL FORCES

I

THERE is to be found in the books of the Old Testament, embedded amid much mythology and beautiful but confusing allegory, a fairly continuous history of the Jewish people from the earliest times down to a period within four hundred years of the birth of Christ. Nevertheless, the clouds of mystery and unreality which have grown up about the New Testament have not failed also to envelope and in some degree obscure these older chronicles; and in many cases it is long before ordinary readers understand that they contain in their most involved passages statements of fact, susceptible of verification by comparison with

the contemporary histories of other nations : that the hieroglyphics of Sesostris and the cuneiform writing on the clay tablets of Nineveh, no less than the annals of Tacitus and the arch of Titus, confirm the books of Moses and of the Kings and of the Maccabees. It takes them long to realize the fact that the principal people who figure in these books were living people and not legendary ; that the Pharaoh of the plagues was an actual king of Egypt ; that the campaigns of Joshua were fought and planned as we read in the book which bears his name ; that David and Solomon and the long succession of kings of Judah and Israel actually fought and reigned and died in Jerusalem and Samaria ; and that, 587 years before the birth of Christ, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, besieged and took Jerusalem, put out the eyes of the last of the true successors of David, and swept away, in a series of vast transportations, the entire able-bodied remnant of the people of the Jews. Yet the Wars of the Roses and the Great Armada are not more real events than these ; and as, before considering the life of Christ, it is essential to consider the earlier forces that had been preparing the stage for his activities, the most natural line to follow is the history of the remarkable and ancient people from whom he sprung, amidst whom he lived and wrought, and by whom he was eventually slain. I propose, therefore, to deal briefly here with what we know of their rise and their fall.

Jewish history proper begins with Abraham. Whether such a person ever actually existed is a matter of no importance: the story of his early wanderings is evidently based upon some traditional adventures which are marked by circumstances of sufficient probability. He is represented as the chief of a small pastoral tribe—a tribe, that is to say, of shepherds, who were living, when we first hear of them, in the country about the junction of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. This is the region called in the Bible Ur of the Chaldees, or later, Chaldea; and here, perhaps already in the time of Abraham, stood the cities of Nineveh and Babylon. The man who is regarded as the ancestor of the Jewish race is thus discovered living in a humble way in a country far from Palestine. But these shepherd tribes were seldom stationary for long, and although they did not at that time make use of the horse they were accustomed to travel immense distances on camels, driving with them their flocks and their slaves; and presently we find Abraham and his tribe, or clan, on the move. From Ur he shifts to Carrhæ, in Mesopotamia, where, perhaps 1,500 years later, the Roman millionaire politician, Marcus Crassus, was to be miserably defeated and slain; and from Carrhæ again he crosses the Euphrates, and moving south-westward through the beautiful country about Damascus, with halts for years at a time here and there by the way, arrives at length in Palestine. He had already adopted and enforced

upon his clan a form of monotheistic worship—a religious system altogether opposed to the general ideas of antiquity; and his long and tortuous route from the Persian Gulf to Palestine was marked by altars and smoking sacrifices to his God.

So much will indicate the wandering habits of the early pastoral tribes. It must be remembered that the whole of the vast region which afterwards included Syria, Assyria, Cœlo-Syria and Palestine—our modern Persia with Turkey in Asia, was then peopled with races of a common stock, and that this little nucleus of the future people of Israel was merely one of a thousand similar tribes, some nomadic like themselves, others already settled in extensive and flourishing cities. Such cities existed in large numbers in the highlands of Judah, along the Philistine and Phœnician coast-line, and in the southern end of the famous valley of the Jordan, near to which Abraham was now arrived; and it was to live among these latter communities that his son Lot presently departed from him. It is now known that a great number of the Jordan cities—thirteen, according to Tacitus—and among them Sodom and Gomorrah, were actually destroyed in a tremendous disaster, probably caused by the action of lightning upon the combustible materials of the ground on which they stood; and it must have been the desire to witness, at almost any risk, so terrific a spectacle, that induced Lot's wife to fall behind and to be overtaken and suffocated by the sulphurous vapours.

It is essential for us to understand how natural and how historically accurate are these accounts of the Jewish patriarchal age. Abraham and his successors, far from being mysterious or imaginary and supernatural beings, were quite ordinary chiefs of nomadic tribes, such as exist in those regions to this day, and must have existed, as we now know, from time immemorial. Only in their religious life, in their conception of the one all-powerful and beneficent God (a conception borrowed, as we shall see, from others), and in their rigid adherence to this belief through good times and bad, did they differ from their neighbours. If we fix these points in our minds we can pass rapidly at this stage over centuries of their history. It is to be found in the early books of the Old Testament ; and if the Pentateuch be read as an historical narrative, as well as an exposition of a religious doctrine, there should be little difficulty in extracting therefrom the major details of the rise of the Jewish people. There will be found an account of their migrations to Egypt, of their eventual captivity and enslavement there, and of their ultimate release ; of their wars and conquests in Palestine ; and of their continual growth in numbers, in opulence, in civilization, and in power, until, from the small family tribe whom Abraham led forth from Ur in Chaldea, they are become, at a period of time still one thousand years before the Christian era, a great military nation capable of putting half a million of men into the field.

The patriarchal age was succeeded, as the necessities of the times changed, by the age of the military chiefs or judges. As we understand the latter word these are somewhat inaptly named ; for, as Milman says, "they seem rather to have been military dictators, raised on an emergency to the command of the national forces." The division of the people into twelve tribes—the descendants respectively of the twelve great-grandsons of Abraham—had been long since effected ; and these tribes, under their different chiefs or judges, were constantly involved in wars, both of defence and of aggression, with the Palestine peoples upon whom they had so suddenly descended and whom they endeavoured so desperately to annihilate and dispossess. Gradually they had won their way northward on both sides of the Jordan until they possessed the land from the Dead Sea to the spurs of Lebanon ; and as they advanced tribe after tribe settled in its allotted region—Judah and Benjamin about Jerusalem, in the lands of the Hittites and the Amorites ; Manasseh in Samaria ; Asher and Naphthali in Canaan ; Gad and Reuben, east of Jordan. Already a vast change had come over them : from a peaceful, vagrant community, busy with their flocks and herds, trusting in their God, studying the constellations that were to them the windows of His heaven, they were become a nation of soldiers, ruthless above the customs of a ruthless age, brave, implacable and treacherous. From spoiling the Egyptians, who at least had been their oppressors, they had acquired the habit, in

their passion to gain the promised land, of spoiling other unhappy peoples who had done them no harm, and who, until their sudden irruption out of Egypt, were probably unaware of their existence. But with this settlement in a partially conquered country their troubles were far from over. The remnants of the dispossessed peoples were in constant insurrection ; the surrounding states, as yet unattacked, fell with one accord upon the intruders ; and although on the whole the Chosen People more than held their own for a time, they were labouring under the vital disadvantage that weakens all confederacies. The tribes were seldom united, and were not infrequently quarrelling among themselves. At length the inevitable happened : their own dissensions betrayed them ; and the loosely organized nation collapsed with a great and, as it seemed, a final ruin before an invasion of the Philistines. The whole country was overrun, the Jews reduced to virtual slavery, and even the Ark of God taken into the enemy's camp. But this catastrophe became, in the event, the saving of the nation. It brought the tribes to realize the absolute necessity of union and of appointing one supreme ruler over them all ; and to Samuel, the last and finest of the Judges, was given the privilege of anointing them a king.

There follow the celebrated reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon : the growth under the latter of the Jewish power to its greatest splendour ; and the building of the great temple at Jerusalem. In the year 979 B.C. Solomon died, and we now enter

upon the final period of their true national history—the period of their decline and fall.

Solomon was barely in his grave before the monarchy he had laboriously perfected cracked and fell in sunder. His son and successor, Rehoboam, was justly unpopular with the greater part of the people, and almost instantly there arose a rival. A civil war was averted, but the still greater calamity of a partition of the kingdom was agreed upon. The son of Solomon retained the territories of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with his capital at Jerusalem; his rival, Jeroboam, was to govern from the city of Tirzah the northern provinces. Thus were constituted the separate kingdoms of Judah and Israel.

For nearly four hundred years the longer-lived of these monarchies subsisted; but the records of both, as one may read in the books of Kings and Chronicles, are the records of decay. They fought each other, they apostatized from their faith, they repented, and then fell again into the evil habits of their neighbours; they were constantly at war, together or separately, with the Kings of Egypt, of Babylon, and of Damascus; and although the gloomy chronicle is illuminated by fitful flashes of glory, the shadow of inevitable disaster is drawing ever nearer and growing ever more terrific. For side by side with these two jealous and crumbling monarchies there was arising in the East, in the same region from which Abraham had come, a succession of kings of almost fabulous splendour and achievement—the kings of Syria, Assyria, and Babylon. Again and again they

swept out of their screen of deserts upon Judah and Israel: now they were flung back, yet again they were victorious and carrying off tribute in money and in slaves; but always they were coming with their chariots and their horsemen out of that vast and mysterious region from which nearly all the civilizations of the world seem to have sprung. The end, however long delayed, was to be foreseen. We may read in Ezra and Nehemiah both of the forebodings of the Jews and of their fulfilment. We may read in Isaiah how the general of Sennacherib, besieging Jerusalem, taunted the desperate garrison with the fate of other nations. Where indeed were the gods of Hamath and of Arpad, or the gods of Sepharvaim . . . ? The tide of Babylonian conquest was then at the flood, and it was not given to the divided Jewish people to stand against this great invasion. Seven hundred and nineteen years before Christ the kingdom of Israel sank under the repeated blows: 132 years later, in 587 B.C., the Babylonians besieged and captured Jerusalem for the last time: the blinded king, his priests, his generals, and his people were carried into captivity beyond the Euphrates; and the Jewish monarchy was no more.

II

It is now generally agreed that the Babylonian captivity was the great turning-point in the history of the Jewish people. When they left their native land to enter into exile they were a people of many

faiths, many interests, many hopes and fears ; but the remnant that returned after seventy years to Jerusalem were a homogeneous community, proud, exclusive, indifferent to the world about them ; wedded only, but that for good and all, to the God of Moses and his laws. It is this which makes those seventy years by the waters of Babylon a period of such increasing importance to the history of mankind ; and an event which, if we wish to learn anything of the state of Palestine when Christ came there to teach, it is essential we should briefly notice.

The Golden City of Babylon, in the immediate vicinity of which the majority of the exiles seem to have been settled, was the greatest city of antiquity and one of the wonders of the world. The awe and terror which this metropolis inspired throughout the civilized nations of the West are reflected in the Old Testament and even in the New. From Isaiah to the Revelation of St. John is a far cry, both in point of time and of human thought ; yet in each there rings out the same cry of exultation—"Babylon the Great is fallen, is fallen . . . !" Long before the time of John, Babylon was no more ; but even as he used the name to express the sense of a vast accumulation of wickedness, so even do we use it in England to this day.

The city lay astride the Euphrates, where that great river crossed the plains of Chaldea on its way to pour its waters into the Tigris and thence into the Persian Gulf. We are the fortunate possessors of the description of an eye-witness, Herodotus, of

Babylon as it stood perhaps 150 years after the Jewish captivity—a description confirmed by recent research. The city was square in shape, each of its straight sides being twelve miles in length. The outer walls, of burnt brick, reached the almost incredible height of 360 feet, and were more than 90 feet thick. The place was built upon the plan of modern American cities, such as Chicago or New York, with perfectly straight streets intersecting each other at right angles ; and each municipal area contained its separate fortress. The palace of the kings alone was double the size of Jerusalem ; and over the whole astonishing and symmetrical mass of buildings towered the glories of the Babylonians—the eight-storied pyramidal temple of Baal, and the “ hanging gardens ” of Nebuchadnezzar. Shapeless mounds of brick and rubble now mark the site of Babylon ; but we must picture this wonderful city as the Jews saw it, stretching its level and unbroken flank for mile upon mile along the almost treeless plain ; its colossal walls, its myriad towers and temples, shining upon the blue and golden waters of canals ; and over all, the hanging gardens mounting skyward, terrace upon terrace, in a blaze of flowers.

Such was the dream-like symbol of their degradation, upon which, for many weary years, the Jews could feast their eyes ; but they found therein at first neither loveliness nor solace. Their hearts turned to the mountains of their lost country, and it was in the anguish of that hope deferred which maketh the heart sick that they sat and wept by the

willow-lined waters of Babylon. Yet, as a broken and an exiled people in that callous age, they had little of which to complain. They were undoubtedly allowed much freedom (as we shall see) in the matter of their religion : such persecution as they underwent appears to have been of a local and spasmodic character ; and with the rise of their prophet Daniel in the favour of the successor of Nebuchadnezzar even these troubles were probably mitigated.

And by this time an avenger was rising for the Jews, and his hand was closing upon Babylon. Out of the Orient, from the cold mountains of Elymais and Atropatene, the hosts of the Medes and Persians under Cyrus came sweeping down upon the hot and fertile Chaldean plains, thick with the millet and the sesame. The Babylonian armies shrank and withered before these hardier invaders ; and 538 years before Christ they captured with ease, by means of a stratagem, the greatest city in the world. The omen of Belshazzar's feast was justified.

Cyrus the Elder, King of Persia, Media and Assyria, the new master of the Jews, was to prove also their deliverer. Under him Daniel rose to the position of Vizier and Minister, and we are thus justified in tracing to his influence the royal edict which, in the year 536 B.C., released the great company of exiles from their captivity. The Jews could return home, and the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled ; but it was perhaps well for the prophet that he had not lived to see that day. For there

had arisen among the Jews a generation that knew neither Jeremiah nor Jerusalem : a race habituated to exile, in love with the Golden City, unwilling to abandon their secure homes and flourishing trades in order to embark upon so unpromising a venture as this one seemed to be ; and only 42,000 men, with their women and servants, followed Zerubbabel, the descendant of David, back to the ruined and desolate capital of Judah. Yet these had joy enough for many more ; and one likes to think of this great concourse of people, with their flocks and their camels, their laden mules and asses, winding interminably across the deserts of Palmyra, their eyes fixed hopefully upon their goal, and singing as they went.

There remain to be noted the causes of the vital change which the Captivity had wrought in this returning residue.

In the flourishing days of the Jewish state before the Captivity, the great Temple at Jerusalem had been the head and centre of the religious system. The whole tribe of Levi, to the number of at least 26,000 men, ministered exclusively to its wants. Every Jew who retained the ancient faith of Moses looked towards this edifice as the one earthly symbol of his God. There were no other temples for the elect ; the various " high places " remaining from earlier days were regarded as heretical by the orthodox. But this centralization of the system of worship had in one way a disastrous effect upon the poor and ignorant shepherds and husbandmen who

lived afar off in the outskirts of the land. They seldom if ever saw the Temple : priests or instructors for themselves they had virtually none : the Books of the Law they had little opportunity to hear and less wit to understand ; and in time even the language of these books became obsolete. The Hebrew tongue fell into desuetude among the masses and was replaced by an Aramaic or Syrian dialect. Little wonder then that they fell away from the true faith and worshipped the Phœnician Ash-taroath or the Gods of Ivah and of Sepharvaim. Moreover, they only followed their betters. In the valley of Gehenna, without the walls of their capital, a perpetual great furnace roared and streamed heavenward, in which the wretched children of the worshippers of Moloch passed in agony out of that life they had barely begun. Even the Temple itself was profaned : the Books of the Law were temporarily lost ; and on their rediscovery we read of the terror inspired in Josiah, one of the last and best kings of Judah, by their forgotten warnings and denunciations. Into so deep a pit of ignorance had the chosen people sunk ; and probably no earthly influence, but the violent shock and abiding sorrow of the Captivity, could have pulled them out and set them once more upon the right way. The Captivity, however, did more than simply rescue them ; it gave them a lease of a new life—a new heaven and a new earth. The emergencies of their exile brought into being a class of men who were to exercise a profound influence upon their future, and who were

to perpetuate their beliefs in so unshakable a form that they have held together the believers through an almost unparalleled series of trials unto this day. These men were the Scribes.

When the Jews found themselves settled down in Babylonia, more or less at peace, and with no bar at any rate to their freedom of worship or their intercourse with one another, they grew into the habit of meeting together in small or large congregations to hear the word of that Law they had so frequently forsaken and were now beginning so fervently to seek. Those among them who could interpret the sacred books acquired in consequence a great influence and became increasingly in demand ; and as more and more of the flock, taught by adversity, returned to the fold, it became obvious that there was required some more regular and copious system of disseminating among the ignorant the knowledge of the learned. If copies of the Law were made, then, wherever two or three were gathered together, there it might be read and there they might learn. And in such wise there came into existence (or so it is supposed) a number of copyists. From these congregations and these copyists there sprang in time, when the Jews were once more back among the olive and cedar-groves of their home, the two great institutions that were to become the pillars of their faith—the Synagogues and Scribes. We shall hear more of these later ; it is enough here to indicate how they arose, and how, out of the evil of the Babylonian conquest and

captivity there came for the Jews the greater benefit of a homogeneity in faith.

We can return to the narrative of events in Judah itself. The home to which Zerubbabel led the returning exiles was desolate and full of the saddest memories. Jerusalem was in ruins; and of the Temple not one stone stood upon another. The country was no more than a remote and insignificant province of the Persian Empire, and Persian governors watched with jealous eyes the efforts of the reunited people to revive some of the past glories of their capital. Their neighbours, the Samaritans, having offered assistance had been rudely repulsed, not unnaturally went into opposition, and by means of representatives at the Persian court threw obstacles in the way of the Jews. To these difficulties fell to be added that of poverty; but through all they persevered. Within twenty-five years the city and temple stood once more, less glorious indeed than in past days, but walled and complete, upon the sacred hills; while under successive Persian kings, governed internally by their High Priests, the Jews commenced their regeneration as a people.

But now we come to a remarkable hiatus in our historical resources. Not long after the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem, the canonical books of the Old Testament come to an end. The gap between the last of these books and the first of the New Testament (or the birth of Christ) represents more than four hundred years; and for the first 230

years or so we hear practically nothing of Jewish affairs. Within this period the towns and isles of Greece rose to their splendid summit of achievement and began their even more astonishing decline ; on the banks of the Tiber, Rome was awakening and stretching out aimless, grasping hands this way and that ; away in the North and East the barbarians, urged on by resistless pressure in their rear, were stirring ominously within the impenetrable forests of Germany and on the endless steppes of Scythia ; the two greatest military leaders of the ancient world, Alexander and Hannibal, compassed their diverse careers, selfish and unselfish, and died, the one in the splendour of success, the other in the bitterness of defeat and betrayal ; but, amid this universal upheaval of the old, Judah, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot," lay enveloped in a cloud of darkness, out of which came scarcely a word or a sign. How they lived or how they fared there we hear nothing from themselves and but little from others ; we only know, from later experience, that these recordless generations were growing ever harder, ever more fanatical, ever more intolerant of other races. Doubtless they loved what measure of isolation they received. But events abroad wrought more powerfully than they knew ; when at length the curtain is rent it is by the sword ; and we see again this unhappy people through the flames and tumult of war, the prey alternately of two powerful kingdoms, with Jerusalem sometimes

in the hands of one, sometimes of the other, until the pressure of yet further external events and their own desperate efforts deliver the Jews out of their torments and raise them, for the last time, to a high estate and to yet more calamitous fall.

The sword that rent the curtain was the sword of Alexander; but it was in another's hand, for Alexander himself was long since dead. This splendid adventurer, King of the Greek state of Macedonia, revolutionized, within twelve years, the whole fortunes of the then known Eastern world. Monarchy after monarchy went down before him: Egypt and Persia, and with them necessarily Palestine, their buffer-state, were among the first to fall; and then he led the unconquerable phalanx eastward, and still eastward, through savage countries almost unheard of and entirely unknown, until he reached another continent and another civilization, and came to rest in the heart of what is now British India. Where he might have ended, could he have induced his Greeks to follow him, no one can say. He was then not thirty, the most fascinating figure of antiquity; and at thirty-two he died. But the military results of his fabulous career, although we shall have to glance at them in this place, were his least important work. He opened the door of the East with the sword, but he let in thereby a greater force. Wherever the Greek phalanx trod there followed hard upon its footsteps the Greek mind.

Alexander died in the year 323 B.C., and instantly

the great loosely-jointed mass of territories he had conquered and hoped to consolidate fell in fragments. The governors he had appointed quarrelled with his successor, set themselves up as independent princes, and then quarrelled with each other. Two of them, however, whose abilities and merits were above the ordinary, carried out in their own fashion the projects of their master, and exercised, from the positions they held, the greatest influence upon the world in general and upon Palestine in particular. These were Seleucus Nicator, Satrap of Babylonia, and Ptolemy, later surnamed Soter, the governor of Egypt. Both of these men assumed the regal title, and soon set about extending the boundaries of their provinces. Both adopted the Alexandrian policy of Hellenizing the conquered; and while on the one hand Greek commercial cities sprang up and Greek influence spread and took firm root over the length and breadth of Southern Asia, on the other, in Africa, Greek art and culture inaugurated a fresh development in the great eponymous city Alexander had founded at the mouth of the Nile. Meanwhile, impotent, disregarded, growing always more savagely bitter over their fall, the little community of the Jews looked scowlingly out from Jerusalem on these great events. They were soon to be dragged into the vortex themselves. With the dispersion of Alexander's dominions they fell successively into the hands of Laomedon and Antigonos the one-eyed, king of Asia, two more of the conqueror's marshals; but within a few years

Ptolemy of Egypt came up out of the south against Antigonus, and, one Sabbath morning, carried Jerusalem by storm. After many centuries their share of spoiling had fallen to the Egyptians. The one-eyed king of Asia got back the Holy City, but speedily lost it again; and thenceforth, for nearly one hundred years, Palestine seems generally to have been included with the Egyptian Empire. But in the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopater, the pendulum swung back once more. Antiochus the Great, King of Syria, the descendant of Seleucus, after some turns of ill-fortune, again wrenched back Palestine for the Greco-Syrian monarchy; while his son, Epiphanes, encroached still further upon the now declining power of the Ptolemies, and riveted as it seemed with greater strength the chains of bondage on the Jews. But the latter, after being thus tossed to and fro between the devil and the deep sea, were now to come into their own. When the veil of darkness is dissipated, and we can see them and their struggles more clearly again, we see also another deliverer at hand.

We advance to the year 176 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes was on the throne of Syria, and was consequently the master of Judah. He was a typical orientalized Greek of the worst kind, versatile and clever, superficial and cruel. A bigoted polytheist, he endeavoured to force upon the Jews the worship of Greek gods; and an apostate Jew having bought from him the degraded office of High Priest, exercised it with intolerable

cruelty for the benefit of the Xenian Jupiter and for him of Olympus. But the Jews were no longer the people of the Captivity. If they wept they wept with anger, not with despair. They rose again and again; they massacred the foreigner without discrimination or pity; they shut the false priest up in the castle of Accra, where he was much put to it to hold his own. Antiochus, in the midst of a victorious march on Egypt, turned wrathfully back to chastise these pestilent people on his flank. Jerusalem underwent another of its numberless assaults and captures. Forty thousand of its inhabitants fell by the sword, as many more were swept into slavery, and the Temple was pillaged and profaned. Antiochus could turn once more towards Pelusium and Alexandria. All was quiet in Jerusalem, as, within human memory, all has been quiet in Warsaw—with the quietness of death.

And now the Romans appear in person upon our limited stage. These people were by this time fairly launched upon their career of conquest and absorption. Practical, narrow-minded, blessed with a strong sense of equity and proportion, but with no imagination and no love or understanding of the arts and those higher things of which art is but the shadow, they were the English of their time. They had been drawn almost unwittingly into the path of military expansion; they had survived crises such as no other people could have faced; and they were now become the

greatest of the Western powers. Twenty-seven years earlier, at Zama, near Carthage, they had defeated and ruined the only man and state capable of defeating and ruining them. Since then they had conquered Philip of Macedonia, and the country of Alexander was a Roman vassal state. The other monarchies that owed their very existence to the great adventurer's sword trembled before this omen ; and they trembled with justice. Their time also was at hand.

The Macedonian war at once brought the Romans into conflict with Antiochus of Syria ; and him they easily defeated at Magnesia in the autumn of 190 B.C. Although hampered by the conditions of the subsequent peace, the Syrian kingdom preserved for some time longer the semblance of power, and what had been lost to Rome, Antiochus Epiphanes endeavoured to regain at the expense of Egypt. In the year 168 B.C. he lay encamped before Alexandria. The helpless Egyptians put themselves under the protection of Rome, and there followed the celebrated incident of the Roman envoy. This man, the consular Gaius Popilius Laenas, appeared before the great king and commanded him, in the name of Rome, to return to Syria and give back to the Egyptians all that he had won. Antiochus betrayed the weakness of his character : where honour and decency should have led him to defy this mortifying summons, he hesitated ; and where he hesitated, he was lost. He feared his fate too much ; and

his deserts were indeed small. The Roman, with consummate audacity, drew with his staff in the sand a circle round the king, and told him he should say yea or nay before he stirred from within it. The heart of Antiochus, "the God, the Brilliant King of Victory" (for so was he styled) turned to water within him; and he gave way without a word.

These indications of the trend of things were not lost on the more thoughtful among the Jews. They saw in Rome their help against the oppressor; but, before anything could be done, the savage and embittered Antiochus was upon them once more. He issued an edict for the extermination of the Hebrew race. Again Jerusalem ran with blood; again it was gutted and dismantled, temple, house and wall. Hard upon these things came another edict, enforcing conformity of worship throughout the Syrian dominions. This edict was also put into operation, but it proved the last straw. The great rising of the Jews began.

We read of this rising in those books of the Old Testament which are not ordinarily included in the Bible, and which are called the Apocrypha. The books of the Maccabees tell of the noble family who headed the revolt and who carried it through to so great a triumph. Since all who run may read these things they can be dealt with sparingly here. We should note first of all that the new Syrian monarchy was now rapidly crumbling away, as the Egyptian monarchy had

already crumbled : the Roman exactions increased ; its kings, for the most part, were incompetent ; and, far away on its eastern border, another people, the Parthians, were continually encroaching. Without these external forces to assist them the Jews could hardly have survived, but with their aid they triumphed. After many reversals of fortune the five heroic brothers of the Maccabee family died, one by one, by violence ; but they had builded the foundations of the new State better than they knew, and Simon Maccabeus, the youngest, left a son, John Hyrcanus, who was to prove an even abler and a far more fortunate man. It was under his guidance that the Jews ultimately broke through the last ties of vassalage. At last the harassed, decimated people could stand upon their mountains free of all men ; again a monarch reigned in Jerusalem, and the second Jewish kingdom was an accomplished fact. The ability of Hyrcanus is manifest in the alertness with which he grasped every opportunity to enlarge and strengthen his power. Offensive and defensive treaties were signed with Rome ; Idumea, to the southward, was overcome, incorporated in the Jewish State, and converted to Judaism by the sword ; and the hated rival, Samaria, was soon afterwards reduced to similar dependence. Above all, the famous Samaritan temple of Gerizim, an object of utter detestation to every orthodox Jew, was entirely destroyed. Once more the Jewish power extended, north and south, between

the Jordan and the sea, to the limits of Palestine. . . . At home Hyrcanus had his troubles ; but when he died after a reign of twenty-nine years he left the state outwardly as extensive and formidable as it had been in the days of Solomon.

His son, Aristobulus, succeeded him, but happily for all concerned died after a very brief reign of crime and horror. The third prince of this line, Alexander Janneus, had a remarkable career. Ruthless, courageous and capable, he was yet defeated by foreign enemies and by his rebellious subjects, and driven from his kingdom ; nevertheless was he able to regain all that he had lost, and even to add to his inherited dominions. He reigned twenty-seven years in all, and his widow, Alexandra, who succeeded him, another nine, but on the death of this talented woman his two sons were soon at blows over their inheritance. Hyrcanus, the elder, an indolent and timid creature, presently resigned his claim to the younger, Aristobulus ; but his minister and virtual master, one Antipater of Idumea, was made of different stuff, and was little disposed to abdicate his own position of importance. He stirred up the moribund ambition of the ex-king, and induced him to try one more fall with his brother. Together they fled to the court of Aretas of Nabatea (or Arabia), and there induced that king to lead his armies against Jerusalem. Yet again was the Holy City besieged : a brother within and a brother without, the last of the Maccabees fought blindly for a thing that

was already slipping from between their hands. This was in the year 66 B.C.

At this time the celebrated Cneius Pompeius (or Pompey as we insist on styling him), then in the heyday of his considerable fame, was engaged in putting down the dangerous power of Mithridates, King of Pontus on the Black Sea. At Damascus, away to the North of Palestine, his general, Marcus Scaurus, lay guarding his communications and watching nearer events; and to him the contending brothers at Jerusalem sent money and requests for aid. They little knew what power, in their hatred of each other, they were invoking. Scaurus decided to interfere, and on the side of the brother in the city, the younger Aristobulus; apparently on the principle that possession is nine points of the law, and that the actual possessor had more to offer of the two. As Antiochus had retired before the mere word of Laenas, so Aretas shrank at the menace of Scaurus. He abandoned the siege: the besiegers fell upon his rear and inflicted on him a severe defeat; and Aristobulus, it might seem, was safe.

But now the tinsel and buckram figure of Pompey appeared upon the scene. He was assailed by complaints from the two brothers and from the Jews against them both. Amid this clamour he moved serenely on, his dull immobility of temper utterly unruffled by the vapourings of this absurd and incomprehensible people. Aristobulus, unused to Roman phlegm, became alarmed and shut himself up in the city. Pompey immediately demanded its

surrender : the vacillating king hesitated, refused, and then gave way ; but it was too late. The legions were already on the march ; and now the fanatical population shut the gates. The almost normal state of the devoted city, the state of siege, was resumed with yet a fresh besieger. Another desperate defence was eventually broken through during the Sabbath devotions of the garrison ; and where the Philistines and Babylonians had entered and destroyed, the Romans entered too.

But Pompey, who blew neither hot nor cold, treated the Jews far better than their ample experience of such disasters must have led them to expect, better indeed than they deserved. He felt no animosity towards them ; he cared nothing for them. He saw them merely as one of the smaller pieces of the great Asiatic puzzle which it was then his business to adjust. This was the characteristic Roman attitude ; but to the Jews, who had the greatest opinion of themselves and of their cause, it proved even more galling in the end than all the meaningless oppressions of their earlier conquerors. For the time, however, there was comparative quiet. Pompey, to their horror, had the curiosity to enter the Holy of Holies, never before profaned by the foot of any man, save only the High Priest once a year ; but he put an end to the excesses of his troops, he spared the Temple treasures, and he levied no immediate exactions. Eventually his slow mind was made up. He ordered the payment of an annual tribute to Rome, the demolition of the city

walls, the contraction of Jewish territories to the boundaries of Judea itself, and the installation of the pliable Hyrcanus as High Priest and Governor under Rome; and then he departed, to face the greater issues of his life, to fail inevitably, and to die of a knife in the back on the sands at Alexandria.

So came to an end the last period of Jewish independence, and over what remains to be said we must waste little time here. Under the new arrangement Hyrcanus nominally, his minister Antipater in reality, now governed the country for Rome; and backed by this power they were able to stand, though at times precariously, against all the rage of factions and all the efforts of Aristobulus and his sons. While the conflict between Cæsar and Pompey shook the Roman world, while Augustus fought and conquered Antony, while Cleopatra reigned and loved and died in Alexandria, the little province of Judea was skilfully steered amid the currents. The pilots were Antipater and his more famous son Herod the Great. This extraordinary man who, at the whisper of rumour, all but annihilated his own family, sweeping into a common doom good and bad, wife, children and grandparents, so that to contemporaries and to posterity his name was a synonym for almost insane jealousy and crime, was yet a most able, beneficent and humane ruler. His people flourished, his territories increased, he built great cities and theatres and palaces and roads. He kept down disorder and he conquered famine. He balanced himself so

deftly upon the rocking platform of favour, and gauged so aptly the fortunes of Augustus and Antony that, when the tumult had subsided, the dust of war sunk or blown away, and the Roman world was at peace once more, he was to be seen of all men the friend of the first Emperor of Rome, lord of a prosperous and enlarged people, and himself an anointed king. He died in the year that saw the birth of Christ, full of honours, terrors and remorse : a broken thing, haunted always, in his loneliness, by fearful ghosts ; hated by many people, loved, perhaps, by none, and yet withal a great and a pitiable man. And so with his end this condensation of Jewish history may also close. We shall take it up more fully when we deal with the early years of Christ ; and the threads we may seem to have disregarded will fall into their places there.

CHAPTER II

PREPARING THE STAGE: THE INTEL- LECTUAL FORCES

WHATEVER may have been the source of the inspiration which led Moses, on delivering his people out of Egypt, to indicate Palestine as the country best suited to their needs, he could hardly in the event have chosen a more central and important locality, or one more disastrous in its relations to the future of the Jews. Even in his remote day it was become a position of great significance and value. The foci of the world's work are shifted now ; but then the land of Canaan was the great highway that linked together the three civilizations of the Western Hemisphere—that on the Nile, that beyond the Euphrates, and that among the Isles of Greece. Already Damascus had been long planted in its incomparable country, and sending forth its caravans of fruits and silks ; already the upper valley of the Jordan was filled with cities ; already Tyre and Sidon, away to the north-east on the Phœnician coast, were flourishing commercial markets, with

their kings and their manufactories and their navies. And with every year this strip of country between the two terrors of the ancients—the desert and the sea—increased in importance as the civilizations around it grew and expanded. Geographically, in effect, Palestine was the centre of the ancient world; and from every quarter of the compass, with every scented wind that blew, with every dusty caravan that shuffled to the music of bells beneath the Damascus gates, with every ship that glided with painted sails into the white harbour of Tyre, it received, willy-nilly, some new idea.

The Jews, in consequence, are a people who have never known, for all their protestations, the simple meaning of isolation. Those very peculiarities which they would have us believe to be the products of their religious exclusiveness are, in fact, the product of the ceaseless pressure of their environment. They have never stood alone, geographically or politically. They pass, in their early days, from one crowded sphere of civilization into another; and when they finally settle down they are found to be in the very vortex of all the social and political and mental movement of their time. They are become the butt of every outsider's fancy, and the channel of every extraneous interchange of thought.

The history of a nation is no more than the story of its environment; and its value as a study is in strict proportion to the importance of that story. This appropriate setting of national history is indicated in the inadequate sketch of the Jewish people

in the previous chapter. But we have touched there upon only one aspect of this outward force—the purely material aspect, dealing with earthly life and death, trade and industry, wars and rumours of wars. It is necessary for us to examine also that other stream whose elements mingle unseen with these clouded material waters; whose influence is constant and eternal, of yesterday and to-morrow; while that of the more obvious current is but as the passing of to-day, its ephemeral life compassed between the rising and the setting of the sun.

It must be premised that practically all the peoples with whom we have dealt and shall have to deal sprang from two of the great races of mankind—the Semites and the Aryans or Indo-Europeans; of whom the former are supposed to have come originally from the country of the modern Persians, and the latter from Central Europe. From Ceylon to the North Cape of Lapland, from the coast of Spain to the extremity of Siberia, these races have gradually worked their way, destroying, absorbing, increasing; and even as they spread their mind was growing also, their civilization was improving, and their myths and legends and childish fears were slowly consolidating into the various religions which afterwards comforted their descendants. And continuously little fragments were breaking off here and there from the great mass and setting up for themselves, as it were, in India or in Asia or in Europe; and these offspring, once they were settled down in their elected homes, developed far more rapidly,

became exclusive, individual and vigorous, and invented in time their own branch languages and faiths. Environment, in fact, had seized its great opportunity; and from their natural surroundings,—from the mountains or deserts or plantations amid which they lived—these communities drew their higher inspirations. And then, as more and more companies of wanderers came to a halt, and pitched their tents or built their cities, they came once more into contact with each other, and their new national lives began to react around them; religious beliefs, no less than forces of commerce or of war, passed from one to another, stimulating, modifying and confirming the shadowy beginnings of these novel interests.

So we must picture the little people of the Jews, at first a mere clan, moving on their slow way among other shifting or stationary peoples of the same stock; continually mingling their ideas with the ideas of others; taking from this one, giving to that, absorbing unconsciously into their own system off-shoots from the concurrently growing systems of their neighbours.

The varying pressure of environment on the mass of Semitic peoples, and the varying texture of the matter upon which it worked, led to certain groups assuming a truly national form and consolidating their social and religious beliefs long before others. Among the earliest to arrive at the higher stages of progress were those from whom the Jews immediately sprang—the communities who had come to

settle in the alternately desert, mountainous and fertile region between the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. We are coming now to believe that some of these Semites carried certain of the sciences—among them astronomy and what we call magic—to a very high degree of perfection. They may indeed have discovered many truths which have since been lost, and which we would now give much to regain; and, beyond all doubt, they were a very wonderful people. We hear of them first in a definite historical and national sense as Assyrians; but even then, some thousands of years before Christ, they are already highly civilized and cultured, with an unmistakable and impressive national architecture, a complicated society, seats of learning, libraries, banks, stamped money, and even an equivalent of our paper currency. The more one reads and thinks of this astonishing people, the more fascinating they become; and there seems to hang even about the Assyrian rooms at the British Museum a vitally true atmosphere of immense age, splendour, and learning, and also of futility, sadness, and decay.

From associations with this great monarchy and with kindred smaller states the Jews started on their own career. But as if they were the chosen people, destined to taste of all that was finest and oldest and most beautiful of man's works, it was not long before they were transplanted into the midst of another great civilization—the civilization of Egypt. Here, along the banks of the Nile, at a time when painted

men hunted the hippopotamus in the valley of the Thames, and when perhaps even the Assyrians were no more than a nomadic fragment of the Semitic hordes, a mysterious nation, highly cultured, artistic, scientific, was erecting the first of those temples whose size and strength have astonished fifty centuries of men and which seem to have blunted the very scythe of Time. Among such surroundings the Jews remained for a space, and it were idle to suppose that they left Egypt as ignorant as they went in. This fresh phase of environment did its silent work, and then they once more set off upon their own way. They had now tasted of two cups of knowledge, but the third was yet far distant ; and we may halt for a while here to observe what these first two contained.

The modern Bombay Presidency in India is largely inhabited by a people called Parsees, which is, being interpreted, the Persians, or the people of Persis. These are the remnants of the one-time myriad followers of the old Magian religion of Assyria—they are the last of the children of Zoroaster. This man, who lived at least three thousand years ago, and probably even earlier, was the first of the known great teachers of mankind. Many years before the birth of Confucius or Buddha, Christ or Mahomet, he was preaching the gospel of the One God, the “spiritual Mighty One,” the “Creator of All.” He seems to have been one of the first of men to examine and understand the power of good and evil and the causes which promote and inform

them. He insists on truth, temperance, purity and helpfulness to others. He seems to conceive of a resurrection and judgment day. Light, as the most beautiful thing we know, is regarded by him as the outward manifestation of God : the sun, moon and stars are His especial symbols ; and Fire, the Spirit of Light which He has allowed to descend to earth, is to this day the offering of the followers of the Magi. Since the days of Zoroaster the fate of all religious systems has befallen his : it has become corrupted, distorted and misunderstood ; but it remains a monument to a wonderful mind and has proved a vital influence in the formation of later faiths.

It may well have been the Babylonian captivity that gave the Jews the opportunity and knowledge to borrow so largely, as they undoubtedly have borrowed, from the Parsees' store of learning. But from their earliest days they must have been in intermittent contact with their Semitic brethren across the Euphrates, and there is a legend which makes Abraham the neighbour and contemporary of Zoroaster. The influence derived from this remote period is indefinite and a matter still of conjecture, but there can be no doubt as to the gifts received in later years. The story of the Creation as related in the Book of Genesis seems to have been based upon a Chaldean legend. The ideas of the immortality of the soul, of angels, of evil spirits and their master Satan, were perhaps also adopted by the waters of Babylon. The Jews came back

from the Golden City with these tenets of an alien faith insensibly mingling with their own, and in the course of time their very ancestry was forgotten and they were hailed as true Mosaic offspring.

I have thought it well to take together the two periods, remote as they are from each other in point of time, at which the Jews came into closest touch with the Persian theology. But in the meantime, between these two events, they had tasted—if they had not drunk deep—of another and a darker fountain. One can imagine no greater contrast than that between the gentle, almost Christian monotheism of Zoroaster and the terrific hierarchy of the gods of Egypt. In that strange land all that should have been clean and simple was mere mystery and terror. The religion, intrinsically lofty though it was, was allied to the art of the necromancer ; and the two were become the weapon of a sacred caste of priests. Of this religion they alone could perform the mysteries, alone could learn of its nobler inner truths, alone could soften the gloom and menace of its outward form. But they employed it as all exclusive castes come in time to employ such means, for their own ends, and that they might draw to themselves all power ; and they hedged themselves in ever more closely behind its sacred screen. Over the people at large the religion must have impended like a perpetual great cloud of darkness and fear. It has been said that the Egyptians worshipped nature, and of the initiates this statement may stand ; but fear of nature was the instrument

with which they ruled their humbler brethren in the faith. With this weapon the masses were crushed into abject servility, and no imaginative mind can wonder how ; for even at this time, when the gods of Egypt are but a memory and a whisper among men, to such a mind this whisper may still travel, sudden and distinct, as upon a cold breath out of the past ; and with it there comes a shadow of awe and mystery, a vision of wizards that peep and mutter, a shrinking within and a hushing of the voice. The spell of old Egypt is not yet dead. We may read the Bible, the Koran, or the Vedas of India, and we shall find in them much truth and beauty, exquisite nobility of thought and language, and here and there perhaps expressions which may sometimes raise a smile ; but the Egyptian Book of the Dead remains one of the most terrifying and solemn conceptions of the human mind. There is certainly neither joy nor laughter in its company ; and from its effect upon us now we may judge in what manner the cult of Isis and Osiris became, in its externals, such a marvel of fearful suggestion. The unhappy children burning in the arms of Moloch, the litter of slain that choked the steps of the Mexican teocallis, were but crude and childish manifestations beside the mental and moral blight cast by the dog-faced Anubis, the hawk-headed Ra, and all the other servitors of Ammon.

In this terrific atmosphere, the inner significance of which was closed to them as it was closed to the fellahs of the land, the Jews lived through several

generations. Many direct impressions they may not have drawn permanently from it, but they cannot have remained cold to the environment of suggestion, and it may not be too fanciful to suppose that the increasingly morose and ungentle Jewish temper was further intensified by such an influence. They were oppressed, exiled, working as mere serfs among a people who hated and feared them; and upon this soil of bitterness and wrath there fell the seeds of superstition and the steady rain of gloom.

Such were the prominent phases of environment through which the Jews passed during that long period of their career which closed with the coming of the Macedonian. If ever there were creatures of environment such were the people of Israel. Their religion was not even in its inception their own. We have no reason to believe the mind of Abraham capable of conceiving unassisted the idea of the Supreme Beneficent Creator, with His incarnate symbols of Truth and Beauty and Simplicity. Such an idea he may have drawn from the greater mind of Zoroaster, or from some unknown predecessor or follower of the Parsee teacher; perhaps even from the compilers of those Vedantic hymns which were sung in India more than four thousand years ago. He was to find that even in Palestine the idea was no new one; for there he found Melchizedek, King of Salem, already worshipping the One True God. So little, in their own narrow meaning of the word, were the Jews the Chosen People; but, in a wider sense, as I have said, they may almost seem to have

been selected to learn more and forget more than any other among the peoples of men. In their own country the pressure of environment, though less obvious than by Babylon or Memphis, was working always along its silent path ; and the situation of Palestine was such that no rumour could run from Antioch to Thebes, from Athens to Nineveh, but much of it filtered through the vale of Sharon and some of it stayed there by the way.

With every effort of the Jews to form themselves into an exclusive caste they only confirmed more powerfully within them the influences they had already absorbed. But their education was not yet complete. The wisdom of the Parsees and of Egypt they knew and scorned and yet imbibed ; but, as yet almost unknown to them, there was arising the greater wisdom of the Greeks.

The Greeks were the most beautiful, practical, inquisitive and artistic of mankind. Whatever was beautiful they loved ; and whatever they loved they imitated and practised with a fierce eagerness of passion that produced results startling in their loveliness. In their day the children of Hellen were everywhere and doing everything. From a little sea-girt country, smaller than modern Portugal, these enterprising people set off to explore the world like children, with laughter and tears—laughter for the mere joy of living, tears for that indescribable ecstasy of wonder and love that visions of great beauty create in our souls. Their white cities and temples sprang up around the Mediterranean like

flowers about a pond. They were so full of life and the joy of it that everything they touched became transformed, and every place they trod seems almost hallowed ground. Their temples were the most faultless architectural work we know; their poetry and drama were little less than incarnate emotions. Their lives seem now to us like dreams, bereft of all the sordid cares and necessities we associate with this earthly process. The laws of nature, of history and of philosophy seem suspended while we think upon the children of Hellen; and we find ourselves wondering if the Greeks ever worried, or ate, or slept or trod the ground like men; or whether indeed they wandered as gods with Apollo on Parnassus, offering up libations of milk and honey to Clio and her sisters; or whether they could not have themselves piled Pelion upon Ossa, and so reached the eternal snows on Mount Olympus and the Palace of the Twelve.

This people had been growing and colonizing while Solomon reigned in Judah and his successors threw away the inheritance he had bequeathed. From early times a certain amount of Greek influence may have penetrated into Palestine through Tyre and Sidon; but the Greeks of that day seem to know nothing of the existence of the Jews. Their first expansion was by sea, and consequently Westward; and it was the conquests of Alexander that finally opened the gates of the East and let loose the flood of Greek culture and thought over countries well trained to appreciate and eager to learn. Before

the days of the Macedonian the Greek cities had reached the summit of their political power. More than a hundred years before his birth the mountains that look on Marathon had looked also on the host of Xerxes melting like smoke before the Attic spears : another eighty years and the Athenian army perished miserably in the quarries of Syracuse ; and it was Alexander's father, Philip, who crushed at Chæronea all that remained of Grecian freedom. But Grecian creative art was able to survive even the loss of freedom. It seemed as if the national spirit, crushed politically, passed on into this more beautiful channel with greater and greater force of energy than it had even previously known. Politically Greece became a wretched thing ; but it was some time yet before the creative spirit died ; and its monuments were builded for all time. In the footsteps of Alexander, through Phrygia and Cappadocia to Syria and Egypt, through Mesopotamia to Babylon and the wastes of Parthia, there sprang magically into being hundreds of Greek cities. The eager, restless, speculative Hellenes, their country lost, but with all the world before them and their minds and talents no man's but their own, flung themselves, with all their old vivacity, into reforming the Ancient East as they had reformed the Newer West. The thing was like a new dawn—as sudden and as miraculous. Within a few generations Medes and Persians, Egyptians and Semites, were learning and talking the Greek tongue, loving Greek works, copying Greek customs and calling their children

by Greek names. We see, as though by the vivid light of a true dawn, the sullen, dark, harassed people of Israel blinking and scowling before this blinding revelation. At first they were as the dweller in the cave ; and the forcible attempts of the Seleucidæ to convert them to the worship of Olympian deities failed as they deserved. But it was not the religion of the Greeks that wrought for them their miracles ; it was their artistic charm. Do what they might, say what they would and will, even the Jews could not hold out against it altogether. The walls of Jerusalem failed once more to keep out an invader, but this time he came armed not with a sword but with a lyre. The higher ranks of the people, the political party of the Sadducees, the religious caste of the Pharisees, the rigid Scribes themselves, one by one succumbed ; and, like a breath of purer air through their clouded and restricted view of things, there ran the Greek elixir of the true life. By the time of Christ this influence was at its height. The Herods, half Greek by birth, and backed by the famous Damascene brothers, Nicholas and Ptolemy, supported it with all their weight. Jerusalem itself was full of Greeks and their works, and even the Rabbis spoke of the language of Homer as divine. Had time allowed it, this force might have saved the Jewish people from their ultimate national disaster ; but the intrusion of the prosaic Romans, and the consequent growth of an anti-foreign party among the fanatical populace, led to their downfall before it had been fairly tried.

Among the Diaspora however—the Jews of the Dispersion—as numerous and influential as the actual inhabitants of Palestine, it had a clearer field ; and although the religious beliefs of the orthodox were by this time too well-ordered and inbound to admit of any modification, yet upon that portion of the mind which no theology can chain the magic wrought in its old inimitable way. And here, under its softening influence, we can leave them. In a following chapter, when we consider the early environment of Christ, we shall hear more of the Greeks in Palestine itself ; and we shall be able to appreciate how great has been their contribution toward preparing the soil for Christianity—a process usually attributed in too large a degree to the Romans.

In our review of the career of the chosen people we have introduced upon our stage, one by one, all the recognized nations of that age and consequently all the main channels of Christianity. Some of these channels soon dried up, others, before they too had finished their work, joined on to newer and more spacious courses, while a few are working still. No life of Christ is complete without a history of his people : it were truer to say it is incomplete without a history of the world before his day. He stands on the summit of a pyramid builded by the great yet lesser teachers who preceded him, and by their still humbler disciples ; and some sketch of this pyramid, of the foundations on which it stood, and of the environment about it, is the necessary prelude to his life.

CHAPTER III

THE STAGE SET: PALESTINE IN THE TIME OF CHRIST

I

THE great geographical and historical importance of Palestine has already been indicated. The territory comprised under this name consists first of Judea and Samaria, a rough oblong of mountain country, then the small but fertile plain of Esdraelon, and finally another group of hills which is Galilee. Bounded westward by the sea, the three provinces look from their eastern flanks into the tremendous gorge of the Jordan, which runs due north and south, and which is so manifestly their natural limit on this side that we have no need to concern ourselves with the meagre history of the trans-Jordanic Hebrew tribes. The country as thus defined is insignificant in size, measuring seldom more than fifty miles from the Jordan to the sea, and no more than one hundred and eighty from Dan to Beersheba; but its situation has raised it to a prominence out of all proportion to its extent or merits.

Imagine a great dyke or causeway, separating an expanse of low-lying, almost impassable country from the sea, and forming the only communication between the two shores of solid ground on which its extremities rest. Such, in effect, is the hill country of Syria and Palestine. Palestine proper, with which alone we have to deal, is isolated from the rest of the system, and has been called an "island," but it is all part of the great articulated "isthmus" or causeway connecting Africa with Asia and Europe. The sea on the one side is the Mediterranean; the low-lying country on the other, the vast and trackless wastes of Palmyra and Arabia Deserta. For both of these the ancients entertained a cordial dislike; and consequently, for some thousands of years, practically the whole human intercourse, friendly and unfriendly, between Egypt on the one hand, and Persia, Greece, and Rome on the other, poured to and fro along this great viaduct. But it was more than a medium of communication; it was in itself a prize for which all these Powers contended: for, apart from its situation, it was a fertile country; fertile even when compared with the valleys of the Nile and the Euphrates. We have already seen how Palestine, in particular, became for centuries little better than the battle ground of the Egyptians and the great monarchies of the East. Before the Jewish people had been heard of it was an old acquaintance of war; and within a small river gorge in Lebanon, beside the inscriptions of the soldiers


of Sennacherib and of Antoninus, of Alexander and of Pompey, there are still to be seen the faint hieroglyphics of the great Rameses himself.

Although in these days Palestine is seen at its worst it can never have been generally beautiful. It is a country of limestone hills, which, now bare and grey, were in former times partially covered with trees—olives, cedars and pines, and, more rarely, the larger oaks and terebinths. Gradually, however, this covering was cut away to make room for the cultivated terraces which were conspicuous objects of the landscape in the time of Christ, but which in turn have now been long abandoned to decay. This destruction of vegetation has resulted in the present arid and waterless condition of large stretches of the country, and possibly also is responsible for the cessation of those falls of “winter snow” of which we read. The still considerable proportion of fertile land, only requiring irrigation, indicates the superior fascinations the Holy Land must have possessed two thousand years ago; but the grey hill-ridges, distorted by earthquakes, and monotonous in form and colour, can never have been other than austere and unattractive. The desolate aspect of so much of the landscape was heightened then, even as now, by the multitude of ruins which covered the hills; ruins of every age and kind. For these Palestine has been long famous; and there can never have been a time, within the range of history, when its inhabitants did not see on their hill-tops these relics

of past and sometimes forgotten peoples. Every age has added its quota to the litter and the confusion: the early Canaanites, the Philistines and the Hittites, the Greeks and Romans, the Syrians and Egyptians, each came, built, and passed away; and now the rubble of some village whose very name has been forgotten stands on an equality with the vast debris of Baalbek, with its cut and polished stones 63 feet long, as but one more testimony to the futility of human endeavour.

It is left to individuals, however, to go in search of beauty; nations have other matters to consider; and from the utilitarian standpoint ancient Palestine had much to recommend it. The considerable general elevation—rising in places to 3,000 feet—the continual alternation of vale and mountain, the adjacent sea and desert—all combined to produce the greatest diversity of both aspect and climate. The inhabitants of the plain of Esdraelon or the sea-coast lowlands of Sharon could look about them upon endless gardens and cornfields and vineyards; could see whole hill-sides, where man had never sown, covered with scarlet poppies and tulips and those anemones to which Solomon in all his glory was not comparable; could look higher and with dread to the hidden peaks whose numberless caves harboured always stray bands of those who, like the Adullamites, were “discontented”; and could see always to the northward, in beautiful contrast to their hot and airless valleys and the dazzling shimmer of their tideless

sea, Mount Hermon with its perpetual cap of snow. Although the Mediterranean, which has influenced so profoundly the peoples who have lived on its shores, seems to have had little direct effect upon the development of the Jews (for we never hear of them taking the slightest interest in maritime affairs as such), it was always in their sight and in their mind. Their kindred, the Phœnicians of Tyre and Sidon, were the first to push out among its real and imaginary terrors; and from the shores of Lebanon, on a clear evening, the Hebrew merchant could see, as a mere ghost of a shadow on the horizon, the first of the fabled "Isles of the West," the home of the Paphian Venus, Cyprus, or, as he would have called it, Chittim. And as the scene changes, so the inhabitants themselves appear as of some new type: here were tillers of the soil, husbandmen and shepherds, wandering Bedouin from the desert, merchants and seamen from the Phœnician ports, fishermen from the sea or from the lakes. The universal acceptance of the Bible and its adaptability to every mind are due to the fact that people of every country and clime find therein similes drawn from some phenomenon with which they are perfectly acquainted: thunder and torrents and grand solitude for those who live in the mountains; heat and gentle rain and the varied types of agriculture for those who live on plains; and for those who live on the ocean's shore the whole gamut of its moods. There is a constantly recurring



transition from the busy, narrow life of civilized cities to that of the "wilderness" where locusts and wild honey were a man's only food, or to the mountain ravines where witches peeped and muttered and brigands lurked in caves. If it is true that some new thing was always coming out of Africa, it is no less true that everything that is old and constant seems to have been poured into Palestine. It typified in itself for centuries the various arts of war and peace, no less than the history and geography, of most of the other countries of the Near East and the West.

Its inhabitants, at the beginning of the Christian Era, were as varied in race as they were in their customs and activities. It is a common belief that Palestine at this period was largely populated by Jews; but, like most common beliefs, it is erroneous. Many races in turn and in conjunction have occupied the country: conquerors and conquered, those who came with the sword and those who came with the arts of peace, drew together and coalesced, traded with each other, married each other, and worshipped in each other's temples. From these connexions only a few bigoted Jews had held aloof before the period of the Captivity; and after that event a swarm of Syrian colonists had been introduced in the place of the exiles. The Jews who returned from Babylon carried exclusiveness to an extreme of particularity: they, however, were but a few; and just as they were regaining some of their old influence in the country

and were increasing in numbers and prosperity under the lenient rule of the Persian Empire, the latter collapsed before Alexander. A new check was given to Jewish national expansion, a new turn given to their interests, and a totally distinct race was introduced into their land. The policy of Hellenizing conquered territories instituted by Alexander and carried out by his marshals, was effected by the establishment of free cities all over Asia, into which, in the first place, Greek colonists were settled. In Palestine this policy was no less thorough and successful than in Asia Minor or along the shores of the Black Sea. The towns along the sea coast, from Berytus to Gaza, Seleucia and Sepphoris in Galilee, the nine trans-Jordanic cities which, with Scythopolis on the west bank, became in later times the confederation of the Decapolis—these, and more, became centres of Hellenic thought and art and religion. They offered, moreover, great opportunities for commerce; and the less rigid Jews, succumbing to that commercial instinct which had made and yet unmade their kindred of Tyre and Carthage, and was to make and yet unmake them, began to spread out among these heathen towns whose free citizenship and equality of privileges for all allowed them to erect their synagogues and worship Jehovah in their own exclusive way.

These Diaspora, or Jews of the Dispersion, could not but be influenced by the Hellenic life of which they now saw so much; and though they adhered

as firmly as ever to their faith, their new mode of existence must have involved some capitulation with their conscience. Even the more bigoted who remained to brood and fret and harden in Palestine were touched with the Greek magic, in secular affairs at least ; but presently the persecutions of the last and worst of the Seleucidæ drew all together in defence of their common beliefs. With the triumph of the Maccabees the Greek cities in Palestine fell into their hands : but it was now beyond the power of bigotry to stop the working of the charm. The Greek names were retained ; Greek words began to creep into common use ; Greek art, among the educated, became an object of the sincerest form of flattery. The advent of the Romans, by widening the sphere of their activities, hastened the dispersion of the Jews. By the time of Christ they were to be found in the Crimea, in Greece, in Italy, in France, in Spain, in Africa. Since the Captivity those who remained in Babylonia had multiplied until they could be numbered by millions : a million more were in Egypt : their numbers and power in Rome itself are testified by many facts. And as, through all prosperity and temptation, the great mass of these emigrants turned in their prayers towards the Temple at Jerusalem, forwarded scrupulously its annual tax, and bowed, in all spiritual affairs, before the word of the Sanhedrin, their increasing influence in heathen courts and chancellories became a powerful instrument on behalf of their compatriots

in Palestine. The Hebrew merchant chaffering in Gaul or Mesopotamia or on the shores of Pontus might recollect with pride that his humble voice was reflected in the leniency with which the Romans, time and again and under the gravest provocation, treated his rebellious brethren in the Holy City.

In the time of Christ the population of Palestine proper (including Phœnicia and the trans-Jordanic provinces) may be divided roughly into three classes of Jews, Syrians and Greeks. Of these it is not unlikely that the Jews, so far from being numerically predominant, were the smallest section ; at any rate, so vast had been their emigration that at this period the Diaspora exceeded in numbers the Jews, Greeks and Syrians of the Holy Land put together. Judea was the only province that remained almost exclusively Jewish ; there was a large Gentile population in Samaria and a still larger one in Galilee. Everywhere else the Gentiles were probably in the majority. Jew and Gentile were at this time living side by side in comparative amity ; but when the Roman element was superadded, the impossibility of for long dissociating religion from politics rendered the mixture a highly inflammable one, and agencies to ignite it were not wanting. Only a few years after Christ's death the whole mass burst up into a final conflagration in which the Jewish State was ultimately consumed.

Of the disturbing elements that ranged about the unhappy country, torch in hand, the most

dangerous was the Messianic Hope. This singular superstition is to be traced back to the prophetic books of the Old Testament : in the time of Christ it was at its height, and the whole Jewish people was anticipating daily the advent of the Messiah. The hope was intimately connected with the immemorial belief that they were the chosen people of God. Under this inspiration they had endured almost intolerable persecution, political extinction and exile ; they had built again and again their Holy City and Temple ; they had borne almost with indifference the pollution of the holy soil of Palestine by heathen communities and gods ; for they felt sure that the time was at hand when God would fulfil His promises to them and raise them to everlasting power by means of the Messiah whom He would send to reign over them. But at length the fanatical proletariat, egged on by the Pharisees, began to grow restless, to mutter, to threaten and to riot. Salvation seemed strangely dilatory, the material benefits which the lower classes alone consider became every day more desirable, and the Gentile domination and possession of these benefits every day more sacrilegious. Among the upper classes, who were better educated but no less narrow-minded, patriotism was gaining ground once more. And so, by the commencement of the Christian Era bogus Messiahs were appearing, gathering bands of enthusiasts and brigands in caves, and being put down by the sword.

It seemed to many of the Jews that John the

Baptist might be the Messiah, and, when he had failed them, Christ. But the characters of these men were not at all what the bigots expected or desired. They wanted no peaceful conversion of the Gentiles, no reproaches for themselves, no discarding of the pomps and pleasures and weapons of the world ; but a king after the good old type, a man who would lead them to sack cities, who would exterminate the heathen with the edge of the sword, and who would make the New Jerusalem a place of enjoyment for the Chosen People alone. A few there were who, while believing in a Messiah, took a wider view of his functions ; but they were indeed few. Christ's refusal to employ force or his own powers for the sole benefit of a handful of Jews would have been quite enough to alienate the majority of the latter, even without his denunciations of their hypocrisy and evil ways.

These denunciations were particularly addressed to certain classes of educated men who were the real authors of disorder and sedition and of all the deplorable disasters that subsequently befel the Jews. The proletariat might take after its kind in being ignorant, bigoted and turbulent, and might think, as it likes to think in all countries, that its voice was the voice of God ; but the hand, by the same law, was the hand of demagogues and mischief-mongers. At the back of all the later troubles of the unhappy country we see the Scribes and Pharisees. The rise of the former during the Babylonian Captivity has already been indicated : their further history will

fall to be included in a brief account of the civil and religious constitution of the State, for by this time they were judges and civil lawyers as well as religious instructors. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were never anything more than a sect. Their actual origin appears to be involved in obscurity, but it is fairly safe to place their inception as a definite party contemporaneously with that of their opponents, the political party of the Sadducees. This party and this sect were no more than the development of the two forces which were continually opposed to each other after the Greek invasion : the force of Hellenism, or the ideas of those who believed in a wide outlook for Judaism, a contact with strangers and in particular an adoption of strange customs ; and the force of exclusiveness and separatism as practised by certain of the scribes, the Assideans or "Pious Ones," who wished the nation to be given up entirely to the study of the Holy Book and who dreaded the introduction of Greek manners. After the Maccabean insurrection and the long drawn-out war which followed, the place of the Hellenists and the Assideans is found to have been taken by the Sadducees and Pharisees. The former were purely a political party, supporters of the throne and of the rational foreign policy of the later Maccabees ; the Pharisees held aloof from all secular affairs and were distinguished by their scrupulous attention to the absurd niceties of the Law, by their contempt of all who were not as they were, and by their lack of patriotism, as we under-

stand the word. It mattered nothing to them who was actual ruler and possessor of Judea so long as they could practise their elaborate ritual, could tithe their mint and aniseed and cummin, and could draw to themselves the empty admiration of the vulgar. With the Sadducees these precisians were always at enmity ; and their differences extended to definite matters of ritual and dogma. The Pharisees, for example, insisted that the oral as well as the written Law was binding ; the Sadducees, for many excellent reasons, denied the value of these inventions of the Scribes, which increased and altered every day to suit every pharisaical exigency, and held by the old written law of the Pentateuch. Again, while the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the body, the Sadducees denied it. These were differences of a purely theological character ; but the great dividing line was another matter involving both politics and religion. The Sadducees, as the almost constant favourites of the governing house or race, practically monopolized the office of High Priest ; and the scrupulous Pharisees, partly from a genuine religious feeling, still more, perhaps, from jealousy, felt it to be an intolerable thing that these worldly men, these soldiers and politicians, fellows reeking of the unclean influences of the camp or the palace, should pollute the Holy of Holies. On the other hand, the Maccabees and Herods dared not if they would surrender an institution the mere control of which gave them more than half their authority.

In the reign of Alexander Janneus things got to such a pitch that civil war broke out, and the Pharisees chased the king out of his country and wreaked fearful havoc among their opponents. But afterwards, as the latter declined in power, these differences became less acute, and at the beginning of the Christian Era had sunk to mere squabbles on immaterial points of dogma. And by this time a remarkable change had come over the two parties. When the two sons of Alexander Janneus, Aristobulus and Hyrcanus, fought for the crown in the time of Pompey, the Sadducees, already corrupted by foreign influences and altogether fallen from their high ideals, took the side of the former, the Pharisees that of the latter ; and party and sect were alike implicated in the shameful political moves that called in turn King Aretas and the Romans on to the plateau of Judea. Henceforward the Sadducees, once the truly national party in the State, were mere instruments to the hand of Rome, or to whoever, in Rome's name, governed Palestine. They came to be hated by their countrymen, who called them Herodians, or followers of Herod, and with the end of the Jewish State they disappeared ignominiously from history. With the Pharisees, on the other hand, this order of events was reversed. They found themselves insensibly losing their old attitude of indifference to secular affairs. To them it came to seem a monstrous evil that the heathen should rule the Holy Land, should erect baths and theatres and temples for his pagan gods upon that

sacred soil, should exact tribute and obedience from God's Chosen People. It is only by the remembrance of these facts that the story of Christ and the tribute money is to be understood. For once the Pharisees and Sadducees (or Herodians) had found someone whom they both hated, someone who was uttering sentiments utterly subversive of all their diverse principles; and for once, to attack the common enemy, they coalesced. Together they went to him and put to him, with much affectation of humility, the simple question—Was it lawful to pay tribute to Tiberius Cæsar or not? Whichever way he answered they thought they had him in a trap; they thought, in the phrase of Mark, to catch him in his words. For if he said no, it was but a step to the Roman commandant of Jerusalem, and the Herodians, who were established in the honourable office of tale-bearer to the latter, could carry a fine story of a seditious prophet who were better locked up out of the way. And if he said yes, the Pharisees could have told the fanatical populace, to whom the tribute and the census and all the other works of Rome were detestable marks of servitude, that the prophet they were following was a traitor and a Herodian, and worthy of nothing so much as instant death by stoning. There would have been an end of this pestilent disturber of privilege and hypocrisy either way. But these tempters, who thought that by taking together their widely diverse views of the question they had covered all avenues of escape, were equally incapable of seeing it as a

whole; until the obvious rectitude and simple subtlety of Christ's answer showed them that there were aspects of this case, as of others, undreamed of in their casuistic philosophy.

Had the belated patriotism of the Pharisees been of a more unselfish character it might have wrought better work. But the spirit which is eternally associated with their name, the spirit which Christ in phrase after phrase of bitter sarcasm held up for human contempt, vitiated all their efforts, and only served to accelerate the disastrous downfall of their hopes, of their followers and of the State. They talked too much and acted too late: nevertheless their death was better than their life. In later years a remnant was at work collecting, editing and perpetuating in the Talmud the vast mass of so-called tradition which had encrusted the Mosaic Law; but with the Zealots who instigated and headed the insane risings against Rome, and who perished amid the flames of Jerusalem or in the caves of Trachonitis, the real party of the Pharisees came to a not ignominious end.

II

On the death of Herod the Great, his kingdom, by the last of his many wills, fell to be divided among his three surviving sons—Philip, Archelaus, and Antipas, all of whom had been brought up in Rome. The question of their succession, however, actually lay in the hands of Augustus, who

retained the right of confirming or annulling the territorial dispositions of his vassal princes ; and as all three brothers were dissatisfied with what their father had left them, while the Jews themselves wished for none of them, but preferred rather a Roman Governor, a court of inquiry to settle the business was held at Rome, with the Emperor presiding. After much intriguing and unedifying wrangling Augustus decided to abide by the will : the Jews were sent empty and disgusted away ; and the Herods set out to take over their possessions.

But in the meantime Palestine was in an uproar. It was being temporarily administered by a Roman official, one Sabinus, who appears to have been arbitrary, inconsiderate, and quite incapable of managing the turbulent populace, who had found their master in Herod, but who did not intend that his despotic methods should be continued by his sons and still less by a Roman. Affairs began to look so threatening that the proconsul of Syria, Quintilius Varus, was obliged to interfere in person. He left a strong garrison in Jerusalem, but no sooner was his back turned than almost all Palestine was up in arms. Sabinus and his troops were held helpless in the capital, while the rebels pillaged towns and arsenals with impunity ; and Varus had to return in earnest with his legions. He defeated the insurgents and crucified two thousand of them, and by the time of Herod's return from Rome the sword had restored comparative order.

By Herod's will, as it was confirmed by Augustus,

Judea, Idumea, and Samaria fell to Archelaus as Ethnarch; Antipas, with the inferior title of Tetrarch, received Galilee and Perea; while Philip, also as Tetrarch, was to govern the inhospitable and unprofitable north-eastern regions of Batanea, Auranitis, and Trachonitis. Certain of the coast towns remained in the hands of the Cæsar. All of the three brothers are heard of in the New Testament, whose brief references to them bear out other historical evidences as to their characters. Thus of Archelaus, a violent and unscrupulous youth, hated by his people and distrusted by Augustus, who de-throned him when he had reigned nine years, we read in Matthew that the parents of Christ, on their return from Egypt, avoided his dominions on account of his reputation. On the other hand, when Christ in the years of his ministry was obliged to retire from Galilee for a time, it was into the lands of the Tetrarch Philip that he proceeded. This prince seems to have been by far the best of the sons of Herod. He managed to control and yet find favour with his turbulent Arab and Syrian subjects, and his provinces increased in order and prosperity in a manner which contrasted strikingly with their previous history. The number of Jews, mostly military colonists of Herod's day, who were settled in these wilds was so comparatively small that Philip was able to dispense with the hypocrisy forced upon his brothers, and to proclaim himself openly a heathen ruler. He selected as his capital, under the name of Cæsarea Phillipi, an old Hellenic

city, Paneas, famous for its Grotto of Pan and its Temple to Augustus, built by the Tetrarch's father ; and the image of the Temple, together with the head of the Cæsar, was stamped on his coins. This just, able, and discreet prince reigned no less than thirty-seven years, but he left no children ; and on his death Tiberius annexed his territories to the province of Syria.

The more celebrated Herod Antipas, called Herod the Tetrarch in the New Testament, lord of Galilee and Perea, entered into his inheritance at the age of seventeen. He was an able, unscrupulous, and, latterly, an unfortunate man. He does not seem to have been naturally cruel, but his execution of John the Baptist, his acquiescence in the death of Christ, and his indiscreet domestic arrangements, which merely prove him to have been occasionally weak, have resulted in his being pilloried as a monster of depravity. Christ, in describing him as a fox, hit off his salient characteristic. He would probably have died in his Tetrarchy but for his second marriage, late in life, with his brother's wife Herodias. This marriage, which in Jewish eyes was illegal and abhorrent, caused all his troubles. The anger of Herodias at John's denunciations of her character led her to contrive his death : Herod's unjustifiable divorce of his previous wife involved him in disastrous hostilities with her father, another Aretas of Nabatea ; and, finally, the desire of Herodias that her husband should be raised to the rank of a king aroused the suspicions of Caligula,

who, in the year 39, when Herod had reigned forty-three years, deposed him, seized his property, and transported him to Gaul, where he died.

Much vicarious interest attaches to Herod Antipas from his connexion with Christ. Within his dominions the greatest of men was probably born, within them he compassed the greater portion of his known career as a preacher, and within them arose afterwards the first Christian community. The Tetrarch seems to have followed closely Christ's career, as he had followed that of John ; and he was probably in no way desirous that harm should come to either. His imprisonment of John was an understandable political measure, and the Prophet had been well treated until the daughter of Herodias entrapped the Tetrarch, during a drunken frolic, into the disastrous promise ; and Herod, although too weak to break his word before a large assembly, was horrified when he discovered to what he stood committed. When he heard of Christ, superstition wrought upon his conscience-stricken mind, and he cried : " It is John the Baptist ; he is risen from the dead ! " Afterwards he expressed a desire to see Christ, a desire which was gratified for the first and last time on that fatal day when Pilate tried to fasten on the Tetrarch the responsibility of which he was so desirous of washing his own hands.

Such were the sons of Herod. Philip and Antipas still held their Tetrarchies at the time of Christ's death ; but long before that Archelaus had been deposed. His conduct had been so barbarous

that for once the Jews actually combined with the Samaritans in an endeavour to rid themselves of him. They sent a deputation to Rome, and on its representations the Ethnarch was summoned thither to explain his conduct. His excuses were unsatisfactory ; he was banished into Gaul ; and the first of a series of Roman officials came to govern in his stead.

Before the latter's arrival, however, the interregnum had been signalized in the usual Jewish manner, by a revolt. To the proconsul of Syria, Quirinius, had been committed the initial reorganization of Judea on Roman lines ; and he commenced by ordering the celebrated census, mentioned by Luke, in order that the new province might be assessed for taxation. This was an essential and commonplace proceeding from the Roman point of view ; but the Law of Moses had defined with great particularity certain ordinances with which it clashed. Only after much murmuring and disquiet was Quirinius able to enforce it on the sullen people. There remained, however, a party of extreme Pharisees, the Zealots, who were determined to resist by force the imposition of a tax which they regarded as an insult to the people of God. The head of this party was a certain Judas, called the Galilean, and it is interesting to discover among his followers that Simon who, twenty years later, became one of the first disciples of Christ. Judas soon perished, and the premature outbreak was quelled, although, as later events proved, the Zealots were far from done with ;

and shortly after the first of the military governors, Coponius, arrived to take over the province.

The phantom of Jewish independence was now utterly dissolved. The people may have asked themselves, now that it was too late, whether it were not better to be ruled by a Herod, who was at least by birth half a Jew, than by these foreigners who were likely to combine the rapacity of the Herods with a complete disregard of Jewish prejudices. Augustus and most of his successors meant well by the provincials, and did all in their power to check their subordinates' extortionate or arbitrary proceedings; but in this they were not always successful, and in the case of the Jews there was in addition a religious question of extreme intricacy.

Roman Judea was not considered of sufficient size or importance to demand a proconsular official at its head, and the governor was of the inferior rank of procurator. He was, however, quite independent of the neighbouring proconsul of Syria, while his military and judicial powers were no less ample, within his own sphere, than those of the latter. The military force at his disposal was inadequate, not exceeding 3,000 men; and by the time he had garrisoned Cæsarea (Herod the Great's new port, which now became the administrative capital), Jerusalem, and Samaria, there were few troops left for keeping order in the outlying districts. On the occasions of the great Jewish festivals, when immense multitudes from all over the world flocked to the Holy City, it was the custom of the procu-

rator to proceed thither in person to maintain order with part of the garrison of Cæsarea. He was also supposed to go on circuit through the province once a year, inquiring into grievances and generally exercising his judicial powers where it seemed expedient. If the provincials believed him to have exceeded these powers they could appeal to Rome, as was eventually done with success in the case of Pilate. In fact, the Jews were allowed every possible freedom in their internal affairs, and but for their irreconcilable attitude with regard to religion, they should have found under the Roman rule such peace and prosperity as they had never previously known.

It was the endeavour of the rulers of all ancient empires to enforce upon their subject-races some uniformity of faith which would take the place of uniformity of nationality; and among the pagan peoples, who at least possessed the merit of great catholicity of religious outlook, and who were quite prepared to take any strange god into their pantheons, little difficulty was usually encountered in this respect. Indeed, in those days, gods and religion were as interchangeable as clothes: the same fundamental ideas lay at the bottom of all theologies, and were expressed by forms and images which frequently differed only in name. The Romans felt no more compunction in admitting to the capitoline temples the grotesque animals of Egypt and the beautiful deities of Greece than the subject races left in worshipping half-imbecile monsters like

Caligula and Nero. Alone among nations, the Jews would have none of this latitude. Their god was their own, and was neither to be insulted by the company of pagan idols nor borrowed for pagan use. This point of view was as distasteful and incomprehensible to the Romans as it had been to the Seleucidæ ; and as the latter had tried to subvert it by force of arms, so the Cæsars, by gentler methods, worked towards the same end. The procurators had to bear this in mind, and to use their influence to introduce Roman forms of worship ; and while Augustus ordered that a bullock and two rams should be offered up daily in his name before the Temple, the Jews, in return, were required to make sacrifices for Cæsar and to pray for him in the Synagogues. The politic Augustus contrived to introduce this leaven in such a way as to cause no grave offence, except among the pharisaical extremists ; but some of his less scrupulous or tolerant successors took less account of Jewish prejudices ; while certain of the subordinate officials, and in particular the celebrated Pilate, were too drastic in their attempts to carry out the Emperor's will. Here, then, taking also into consideration the perpetual grievance of the taxes and the mistaken introduction into Judea proper of legions formed of the hated Samaritans, were all the materials for the great explosion which subsequently ensued.

Under Augustus the procurators remained only three years in office, this limitation having the praiseworthy object of curtailing their opportunities

for spoiling the provincials ; but Tiberius worked along different lines. He selected with great care men whom he believed to be trustworthy and capable, and permitted them to retain their office for considerable periods of time. Under the first, or Augustan method, there came and went three procurators, Coponius, Marcus Ambivius and Annius Rufus, of none of whom has much record, whether good or bad, come down to us ; the fourth, Valerius Gratus, was nominated by Tiberius in the year 15, and governed Judea no less than eleven years. His successor, who remained in office for another nine, and with whom we shall have to deal in another place, was Pontius Pilate.

Large and oppressive though these procurators' powers may have seemed to the Jews, it has already been remarked that the latter were in fact allowed much latitude in the ordering of their own affairs. All purely Jewish civil or religious questions were regulated by local councils, one for each of the ten or eleven administrative districts into which Roman Judea was divided. These councils, which numbered from seven to twenty-three members, seem usually to have exercised their functions in the Synagogues, and to have been primarily composed of Scribes. These men now possessed immense power within the limits of Judaism. As the Jewish civil and religious laws were inextricably mixed together in the Books of Moses, and were both unfitted for more modern conditions and in themselves actually incomplete, while the language in which they were

written was an obsolete one, it will be understood how to the Scribes, who were their sole official interpreters, had fallen the lot of amplifying and amending these archaic statutes. In the process, they had themselves risen step by step from mere copyists to expositors, codifiers, and at length actual law-givers; and were by this time become administrators of civil as well as of religious justice. They could fine, scourge, imprison and sentence to death; and it is of them that Christ more than once warns his followers to beware. While the procurator had power, if he saw fit, to annul any of their sentences, only in the case of the death penalty were they obliged themselves to obtain his confirmation. Over Roman citizens these councils had in theory no authority; but the Emperor had made the great concession of allowing them under certain circumstances, such as the profanation of the Temple, to bring even a Roman before the main council, or Sanhedrin, of Jerusalem.

This great council, the father of all the rest, is believed to date from some time anterior to the Captivity; although the Jews like to refer it, with most of their other institutions, to Moses. It appears to have numbered seventy-one Scribes and Priests, who were admitted by the laying on of hands, and the High Priest was its president. Here again, however, the power lay with the popular Scribes and not with the titular head and his fellow-priests of the Temple, who were Sadducees and usually friends of the procurator, and in consequence without influence

on the masses. The Sannedrin, subject to the procurator's veto on the death sentence, had practically complete administrative and judicial control over Jerusalem and its neighbourhood, while exercising a general supervision over the local councils ; and its authority in religious matters was admitted wherever Jews were to be found. Its arm stretched far ; as, by another noteworthy concession of the Cæsars, a Jew who had contravened some Mosaic Statute might be haled from any part of the Roman Empire before the council at Jerusalem ; and it was on such an errand of arrest that Paul, a Pharisee and an official under the Sanhedrin, was dispatched against the Damascene Jews who had been swept into Christianity.

Some idea may be gained from the foregoing of how immense by the time of Christ was the power of the Scribes. In the New Testament their name is coupled with that of the Pharisees as the virtual rulers of Jewish thought ; and of the Pharisees, a mere sect with no legal status, many were Scribes, while nearly all the Scribes were Pharisees in opinion. The Sadducee, or Herodian, or pro-Roman party were virtually without a vestige of power over the people. Every aspect of Jewish life was regulated by the Law ; and that Law the Scribes could now mould and interpret, without fear of serious contradiction, to suit their own designs. Nominally, every new interpretation required the assent of the Sanhedrin ; but in practice that assent was never withheld, for the Sanhe-

drin was in their hands ; and once they had thrashed out among themselves and reduced to a formula some religious or civil question, that formula came instantly into operation. Such of the Scribes, and there were some, who were broad-minded, or who were Sadducees, and who consequently differed from their colleagues and saw with regret the dangerous path along which the ignorant proletariat were being led, were quite powerless to check the popular movement. For in the Synagogues, which had risen contemporaneously with the Scribes, the revolutionary majority of the latter had a magnificent instrument of instruction and coercion. The New Testament is eloquent on the varied uses to which it had been put. It was a church, a school, a court for the administration of both ecclesiastical and civil law. Within its precincts God was worshipped, children and adults were taught, and criminals were fined and scourged. It was to be found in the time of Christ in every town in the Roman Empire where Jews congregated in any numbers ; and wherever it was found it was working continuously towards one end—sedition and its corollaries of rebellion and disaster.

To one other class of men the Gospels make continual reference—the publicans. Since many people appear to have but the vaguest notions as to the status and business of the publicans, and as to why they were so universally classed with sinners, their occupation may be briefly defined. They were the outward sign of that aspect of servitude

which, of all their trials, real and imaginary, the Jews perhaps felt most keenly. They were the product of a bad but almost universal system adopted to simplify the collection of taxes in remote provinces of the Empire. To save trouble the taxes were farmed: that is to say, the right of collecting them was hired out annually to certain wealthy capitalists for a lump sum down. This disgraceful system, which has existed within quite recent times in England and other European countries, simply meant the creation of a class of licensed extortioners; for the capitalists or farmers naturally endeavoured to wring from the wretched taxpayer as much as they could for themselves, over and above the sum they had to transmit to Rome. These farmers, however, did not appear in person in this transaction, but lived in opulence in their villas like modern company promoters; while their unfortunate subordinates, the publicans, who carried out the work, lived in an odour of execration and contempt. It required the infinite charity and width of mind of Christ to point out that these instruments were only doing their duty and earning their own bread; and that the degraded publican might in fact be not only a better man than his master, but might be capable of good works and thoughts above the comprehension of any Pharisee or Scribe.

III

For one prominent feature Palestine was as remarkable in the time of Christ as it had been two thousand years earlier and as it is to-day. It was a country of walled cities built on hill-tops. The lesser valleys and the plains might be a tapestry of vineyards and fields of rye and barley, and the hill-sides above alive with white flocks which drifted this way and that, feeding among scarlet flowers ; but with nightfall, the whole great population—far more numerous then than now—which tended corn and vine and herd, vanished as one man within the city gates. For in Palestine it is the valleys which were (and indeed still are) unsafe ; and to live anywhere in isolated dwellings or even in small hamlets was to court robbery and assassination. It was unsafe to loiter without the gates of Jerusalem itself after dusk had fallen suddenly on that strange land ; for with the shadows there sallied forth from the caves of the higher mountains some of the great company of banditti who, from the earliest times, have lived their whole lives as troglodytes and thieves. And to this terror by night there fell to be added in many parts of the land a far more serious danger. From the great trench of the Jordan valley terrific bleak ravines push up into the heart of the country ; and up these channels, and through the plain of Esdraelon, there flowed and ebbed a capricious but endless tide of nomads from the desert. Mostly they came in small raiding parties, who would rob

and kill a stray traveller or two, and plunder and burn some village where the walls were weak or the watch sleepy ; but sometimes, as we read in the Old Testament, a great host would come sweeping out of the glaring East in a regular invasion of Palestine, so that their tents "lay along the valley like grasshoppers for multitude." Only under Herod, who understood the duties of a king and was strong enough to practise them, and later under the Romans, did the people of the Holy Land know any real peace from these Bedouins and thieves.

It followed that these towns, universally walled and frequently built on sites that would admit of little expansion, were very restricted in area and very cramped and intricate within their defences. Except in the case of the sea-coast towns, to which the Arabs did not penetrate, suburbs were almost unknown. The gardens of the rich lay without the walls ; for inside there was no room for gardens, the choked mass of houses, many of which were of considerable elevation, filling every available yard of space. In Jewish and Syrian towns, which were generally built with little regard for any settled plan, these houses were notable for a scarcity of windows and consequent indifferent ventilation ; and as many domestic duties as might be were carried out upon the roof-tops. Here the people went for air and sleep, for food and prayer and recreation ; here they planted shrubs and vines about the battlements ordained by the Mosaic Law ; and hither, on any occasion of riot or excitement the whole

populace would crowd to see and hear. The tall houses, with their few outside windows heavily latticed, were admirable positions of defence ; and in the case of Jerusalem, on the occasion of each of its many captures the assaulting columns had to fight their way, with rams and axes and torches, from house to house ; while the women prayed and wailed on the roof-tops, and the men, from over the battlements, hurled any missiles they could find on to the enemy in the street below. The streets themselves were so narrow and intricate as to constitute a serious difficulty to any assailant, being generally little better than alleys, perhaps eight feet wide, running between almost blank walls fifty feet high ; and in times of peace they were noisy, dirty and crowded to a degree which no modern European slums could equal. They were as unsafe after dark as the country without the walls ; and then only a few robbers, the watch, or some party returning from a feast with torches and a guard, moved among the black and dirty labyrinth of ways.

The most prominent buildings in small Oriental towns in the time of Christ were the gate-towers and the synagogues. The many functions of the latter have already been noticed. They were usually plain rectangular structures, with some Jewish or debased Greek ornamentation about the porch ; and were built, whenever possible, near to running water, where the congregation might perform the ablutions prescribed by law for those about to enter a house of prayer. The interior was no less simple

than the exterior ; containing a chest for the works of the Law, a reading-desk—possibly on a platform, and seats for men and women, who, it appears likely, were separated. The foremost benches came in course of time to be reserved for the Elders, Scribes, and Pharisees. Among other necessary appurtenances of the building were trumpets, used in ceremonies, on feast-days, and at the advent of the New Year ; and a lamp, which was always kept burning. The days of service were Monday, Thursday, and the Sabbath, and of course certain Holy Days ; the most important service being that of the Sabbath morning. This was opened with prayers, during which the whole congregation turned towards the Temple at Jerusalem ; and consisted further of various readings from the Old Testament (which were translated to the audience by an interpreter), an address given either by a scribe or by some one considered sufficiently competent, and other interspersed and valedictory prayers. So it was that Christ, even if he were not a Rabbi, as some think he may have been, was able to go up into the Synagogue at Nazareth, and, being given by the minister the Book of Isaiah, to deliver from its text the address beginning : “ This day is the Scripture fulfilled in your ears.”

The Synagogue had usurped some of the functions with which, in the Old Testament, the City Gate is associated. By the time of Christ the Elders no longer sat there to administer justice ; but it was still a great meeting-place for the townspeople,

where idlers lounged in the shade to hear the news, where the rich came to be flattered and the poor to be relieved, where the returning merchant was awaited by his friends, and where public proclamations were read by the town crier. The gate-towers were always fortifications, with a guard-room over the porch : a watchman continually patrolled the roof ; and with the fall of night the great leaves were shut, the bolts run home, and ingress or egress alike intermitted till the morning.

But these little Oriental towns, with their huddled dwellings and dirty streets, had little in common except their sites and their walls with the superb cities built by the Greeks and Romans. Those which simply adopted and modernized the old Syrian type doubtless retained many of the latter's disadvantages ; but the conceptions of the Herods and Seleucidæ were on so large a scale that everything they touched became transformed out of all knowledge ; and where they had a free field to create they equalled their models in Italy and Greece. The Herods in particular had a passion for building and magnificent ideas. Herod the Great rebuilt Samaria, and styled it Sebaste (the August) after his patron ; he filled Jerusalem with palaces and rebuilt the Temple on a scale of unparalleled magnificence ; he built near Jericho an immense palace for himself ; and he finally founded on the site of an ancient, and perhaps extinct, township on the sea-coast the celebrated city of Cæsarea. Since the collapse of Tyre and Sidon no great port

existed on the Mediterranean ; and Herod desired at once to remedy this fault and to improve his communications with Rome. Even in that age of great works, the building of Cæsarea was a remarkable achievement. In twelve years there stood complete above the sea a semi-circular city of magnificent houses, with a great quay, a mole fifty feet long fortified by a wall and towers, an astonishing drainage system, two theatres, and a temple to Augustus. Its suburbs of villas and gardens stretched far around it, and it is said to have had a population of 200,000 people. Yet Cæsarea has long been utterly deserted ; and now only acres of disrupted blocks and pillars, littering the hillside, together with the titanic remnants of the mole, remain of the city where Cornelius received his vision, where Paul stood in chains before Felix and Festus, where Origen studied, and where Eusebius was born.

The later Herods inherited the family love of building and sense of magnificence ; and Archelaus in his short reign rebuilt his father's palace at Jericho, which had been destroyed by the rebels, and also founded the eponymous Town of Archelais ; while under Philip's rule there arose Julias and Cæsarea Philippi. But perhaps the most famous Gentile cities in Palestine, if we except the mushroom grandeur of Cæsarea, were the ten Greek cities known as the Decapolis, which, originally founded by Alexander or his successors, are believed to have been formed into a defensive and

commercial confederacy by Pompey. Of these, Damascus, the most northerly, is one of the oldest cities of the world, and by reason of its incomparable situation and its position on the great trade route from Lower to Upper Asia, it is still as large and cosmopolitan and populous as ever ; although of course it has long ago reverted to the style and appearance of an Oriental city. But in its confederated brethren, whose numbers were not always confined to the initial nine, life has long been extinct. Beautiful they must all have been, with their white temples and palaces, their clean broad streets and fan-like theatres, shining like flowers along the slopes of the limestone mountains of Moab and Gilead and Bashan ; but to the patriotic Jew they were objects of envy and hate, their charms were those of the idolatrous sorceress, their loveliness a canker and corruption in the land. Often must they have been cursed with all the fluency and comprehension at the command of the wandering huckster or shepherd. And now, indeed, the curse has fallen ; the nine cities are everlastingly silent ; and to the young eagles of Hermon, essaying their first flight in the frozen air above the snow-line, these heaps of white fragments that lie far below them, dwindling away along the hill-sides to the southward, may well seem to be the vast bleached limbs and skulls of some giant race, at whose battle-broken bodies their fathers had pecked and torn.

Under Roman rule these Greek cities answered

for their deeds only to the procurator and to the Eternal City ; they were quite independent of Jerusalem ; and each governed a tract of surrounding country of varying extent. Together they formed a belt of Greek culture and control along the whole eastern boundary of Palestine ; and the four northernmost (excluding Damascus), Gadara, Pella, Hippos, and Scythopolis, whose territories were co-terminous, completely closed round the southern end of the Lake of Gennesareth. The Gadarenes, in particular, looked directly across the lake to Tiberias and Capernaum and Magdala ; and Christ and his disciples, as they walked along the beach, could see far off on the hill-sides that rise from the opposite shore the small, faint, gleaming theatre where the fellow-townsmen of Meleager and Menippus, utterly unconscious of the revolution in the world's thought which was opening at their feet, listened to the dramas of Sophocles or the comedies of Menander.

This lake, which to most of the highly cultivated people of Gadara was simply the haunt of horrid, uncouth Jewish fishermen, was to become, in virtue of its association with Christ, one of the most fascinating sheets of water in the world. It lies on the map strung like a bead midway along the twisted stream of the Jordan, which river, after issuing again from its southern end, commences that last unparalleled headlong descent into the great pit, 1,300 feet below sea-level, which Nature has dug for the Dead Sea. The Lake of Genne-

sareth, or Galilee, or Tiberias, as it came later to be styled, is itself 680 feet lower than the Mediterranean. It is of no great size, being thirteen miles from north to south by about eight from east to west; or rather longer and considerably broader than Windermere. In the time of Christ it was a great centre of industry; for its shores were dotted with cities, whose inhabitants were energetic and prosperous, appearing to have included a higher proportion than was usual (though, indeed, that is not saying much) of unsophisticated and wide-minded Jews of an intelligent class. They lived their secluded lives far from Jerusalem with its extreme fanaticism, its hide-bound and childish prejudices, and its super-subtle Pharisees and Scribes; and many of them lived by boats and fishing, a calling which, although it be only exercised within the limits of a small lake, may be supposed to bring with it some of that honesty and good sense we associate with those who go down to the sea in ships. It is at least significant that Christ, who so rarely mistook his men, chose four of his first disciples from this class.

Of all the towns about the lake which are mentioned in the Gospels only one retains any of its former state, and the sites of nearly all the rest are still matters of argument. Tiberias, a busy and exceedingly dirty little place of between 2,000 and 3,000 inhabitants, the haunt of pilgrims on account of the legendary virtues of its springs, is now one of the four sacred cities of the Jews;

but it had only just been founded by Herod Antipas, who built it on a graveyard and peopled it with pagans, when Christ came to the lake to live and teach. It lies midway along the western shore ; and about three miles to the northward the filthy hovels of Mejdél or El-Migdel may mark the site of Magdala, from which came that Mary whom Christ cured of seven devils. This place stands at the southern extremity of the little crescent-shaped plain of Gennesareth, from which, in those days, the lake took its name. Somewhere, probably, upon this plain, which is only four miles in length, stood Capernaum, which Christ made his home. It must have been a place of some importance, with a synagogue, and a castle, and a small Roman garrison under a centurion ; but its actual site is as problematical as that of the Evangelists' Bethsaida, which lay still higher up the lake, probably about the plain through which the Jordan rushes after its torrential descent of nearly 700 feet from the lake of Huleh, ten miles away. This Bethsaida was apparently a township quite distinct from the Tetrarch Phillip's foundation of Bethsaida Julias, which lay a little way up the river itself ; and between it and Capernaum lay Chorazin, a place of some size and pretensions. All these cities are no more : they lie in the same majestic silence and ruin of death which enwraps their greater rivals of the Decapolis ; and their blocks of basalt and granite, which once looked down on Christ walking with James and Peter, on Matthew

taking toll of the merchants of Tyre, on Jairus and his daughter, are now flung about the hillsides like children's bricks, or go to make the hovels of the wandering Arabs. Unto this day, at least, has the lot of Tyre and Sidon proved more tolerable than the lot of these.

Along this western shore there seem to have been many more small townships whose very names have been lost ; the opposite side, more inhospitable, was less thickly populated. But along its southern portion, about the borders of the lands of Gadara, were the villages and tombs of Gergesa or Gerasa, near the declivity down which the swine ran madly into the sea ; and there also were the Decapolitan cities of Hippos and Gamala : Hippos with its beautiful temples and theatre shining along the water's edge, and Gamala, astride its tremendous promontory, 1,100 feet high, the most celebrated of Jewish fortresses ; which the legions of Vespasian, after one disastrous repulse, carried by storm, slaying of its inhabitants and garrison all except two women. Lastly, at that southernmost point where the lake dwindles and becomes the Jordan once more, there probably stood the important city of Taricheae, a place with a large population in the time of Christ, a flourishing ship-building industry and the best harbour on the Galilean Sea.

We must try to picture this lake as Christ knew it—as a great, hot, water-filled pit in the earth, far below sea-level, with the mountains rising on all

sides from a beach of white sand, their slopes covered with wild flowers and vineyards and gardens of pomegranates and figs; with large yellow butterflies fluttering in and out the mimosa shrubs along the shore; with the lateen sails of many boats passing to and fro across the water; with the tiny bright-patterned kingfishers taking their own small toll of the crowded depths; with a sub-tropical climate, so that the thermometer shows 105 degrees in the shade at Tiberias; and, by way of contrast, with the snows of Hermon perpetually in sight to the North. We must rebuild in our imagination all these numerous cities: Tiberias just rising to completion within its white walls and towers, to the cries of masons and carpenters; Magdala and Capernaum and Chorazin and many more, darker and dirtier, perhaps, but busy with their tanneries and potteries, and dispatching daily across the lake their fleets of fishing-boats; Gamala and Hippos across the water, and farther away, Gadara, looking down with some scorn upon these people who knew not scientific philosophy nor the arts of Greece; and, by Jordan in the south, Taricheae, with the music of shipwrights' hammers singing about its yards. The whole civilized circlet of the lake was then filled with the liveliest human activity, and constituted, in fact, the most industrious and populous district of Palestine. The white villas of the rich shone within groves of trees; roads ran round the lake and a great aqueduct was rising behind Tiberias, near where

the hot springs of Hamath sent up their clouds of steam. The highlands about this busy hollow were for the most part bare and unprofitable ; but in touch as it was with the wider world of the Decapolis there can be little wonder that Christ, who knew it well, chose it for the scene of his initial ventures.

Thirty miles of mountains separated the lake from the sea. Straight across these, due west from the plain of Gennesareth, lay the city of Ptolomais, now Acre, beneath the great promontory of Carmel. There is no actual mention of this city in the Gospels, but with it began the famous plain of Phœnicia ; whereon, twenty-five and fifty miles respectively north of Ptolomais, stood Tyre and Sidon before their gardens and groves. Both of these great cities had sunk far in their long decline before the time of Christ. Tyre, after sustaining triumphantly a siege of five years by Shalmanezar and one of thirteen years by Nebuchadnezzar, was taken and sacked within seven months by Alexander. The inhabitants of Sidon burnt themselves in their beautiful city when attacked by Artaxerxes Ochus, King of Persia, in the year B.C. 351. They had both seemed to recover from these disasters, and indeed, where many have fallen, they still survive : but in effect their trade left them with their supremacy, and was absorbed by the upstart rival Alexandria. Of the mariners who sailed to Tarshish and the pillars of Hercules, who were the first to enter the Atlantic, who carried Sidonian glass and

Tyrian purple to the islands of the Cassiteridæ, and there bartered them for Cornish tin, we hear no more.

Ptolomais, Tyre and Sidon, no less than the crowded cities of Gennesareth, should have been familiar to Christ from an early age ; for half-way between these diverse centres of industry lies Nazareth. Here, at any rate, part of Christ's boyhood was passed ; and here, as it now seems likely, he may have been born. Then as now, Nazareth was a large village or small town lying in a cup of little hills high up in the Galilean mountains. It is important only in its connexion with Christ, for it has none of the intrinsic interest of Cæsarea or Tiberias or Jericho. According to the Gospels, it had a bad reputation in those days, when doubtless its inhabitants were prepared to transform themselves, at a moment's notice, from shepherds and husbandmen into banditti ; but now it is a rather ugly Christian town of 10,000 inhabitants, progressive in its ideas and increasing in size. A Greek church stands on the supposed site of the Synagogue where Christ preached his sermon : the only well obtains its water from the same spring to which his mother went for hers ; and visitors may take their choice from the rocks around for that from which his infuriated fellow-townsmen tried to throw him. From some of the little hills which surround Nazareth Christ could see, far away on his right, Carmel headland and the shining Mediterranean ; on his left Mount Tabor and the faint

mountains of Gilead and Bashan beyond the Jordan Gulf ; behind him rose the Galilee mountains and Hermon, snow-capped or wreathed in cloud, with the city of Dio-Cæsarea, the Roman capital of Galilee, and Cana, where the wedding feast took place, in the foreground ; while at his feet lay the beautiful plain of Esdraelon, thick with the fruits of cultivation, and, beyond, the rugged limestone hills of Judah. In the following chapter we shall consider the reasons for believing that Christ did not spend all his unrecorded years in Nazareth ; but altogether apart from these, upon a mind so powerful and an imagination so vast and beautiful as his, this prospect must have wrought at times like an elixir, calling him inevitably to explore and learn, to see the cities that glittered in the distance, to push out upon the sea, to ask of God's world whether it had not more to teach than he could learn in Nazareth.

Some four miles south-east of Nazareth, along the road to Scythopolis, lay "the city called Nain," where Christ brought the widow's son back from the dead ; and there are still to be seen the rock-cut tombs to which, perhaps, the funeral procession was advancing. Still more important, in view of the discussion now in progress as to where Christ was born, is the little village of Bethlehem of Zebulon, seven miles to the west of Nazareth. It were idle here to enter into this intricate matter, in which are involved questions as to the literal translation of the original Greek, the methods of Augustus, the census

of Quirinius, the accuracy of the Gospel writers, the Talmudic traditions and I know not how many more : it will be enough to mention that three possible sites for the event are now admitted—Nazareth itself, the most likely, the obscure village of Bethlehem close by, and the larger traditional Bethlehem of Judea ; and leaving to others the Sisyphean task of attempting to clear up such insoluble mysteries, of which there are only too many in the history of Christ, we can proceed southward to the two great cities which are indisputably connected with the last days of his life—Jericho and Jerusalem.

It is supposed that when he left his Galilean friends on Gennesareth shore for the last time, Christ took the lonely wild road down the Jordan valley to Jericho. Starting nearly 3,000 feet below the highlands of Judea, this extraordinary chasm sinks continually deeper below the earth's surface until it ultimately widens out into the basin of the Dead Sea, less than twenty miles distant from Jerusalem, but no less than 4,000 feet below it : and the river itself twists and turns in such a remarkable series of convolutions that it travels two hundred miles where, as the crow flies, the distance is only sixty. Along its banks rank vegetation rises and withers rapidly, but nowhere else in this terrible valley is there food for man or beast ; there are no towns nor hamlets nor any sign of human life save the remains of Roman bridges at two of its fords ; only the shallow river rushing this way and that

through a desolation of sand and boulders and cactus, engulfed in terraces of white, clayey hills, with a torrid temperature within and the blue sky without blazing like a hot lid. Only at its southern end, before the river vanishes in the Dead Sea, there remains a small well-watered oasis of fertile and slightly elevated land. Here, amid its famous palm groves, stood the Herodian Jericho, the second of its name, where Christ healed the blind beggar at the gate and passed on to stay with Zaccheus the publican. The famous Jericho of the Old Testament had been long extinct; the noise of trumpets, we are told, dissolved into mere rubble its walls and towers; and when Christ came there it lay, as it lies to-day, utterly hidden beneath a barren, sandy hillock beside the so-called fountain of Elisha. But Herod the Great built near this site one of his magnificent palaces, around which there grew up a handsome Roman town. Here the wretched man came in the hope of bathing away his torments in the hot springs of Callirhoë; here he died in agony, gasping out orders almost with his last breath for the disposition of his kingdom, the execution of his son, and the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem. If there be anything in this last story, Christ must have looked with curious interest upon the great palace, restored by Archelaus, from which came forth the messengers bearing in their hands that fate from which he is supposed to have escaped so narrowly.

From the palms and pleasant greenness of Jericho

a wilderness of limestone moors, parched and bare and brown, utterly featureless, devoid of any habitation, roll up to Bethany, outside Jerusalem. Profound gaunt valleys intersect this monotony of desolation ; and, threading its way delicately among them, a celebrated road zig-zags up from the stifling gulf to the Holy City. No more than twelve miles by line, it yet takes five or six hours even to ride down it to Jericho. Robbers have always found it a happy hunting-ground ; and before Christ's day and since many a traveller has gone down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fallen among thieves by the way.

Up this tremendous ascent Christ and his little band of followers toiled after they had bidden farewell to Zaccheus. The beautiful white houses of Jericho, the granite and marble palace, the palm and balsam groves sunk out of view ; and the forbidding dun-coloured landscape closed in on every side. Probably the winding road was already dotted with pilgrims on their way to keep the great feast, their figures coming and going along the ridges on the sky-line ; probably the sun was blazing out of a cloudless sky and the thick dust was rising heavily and powdering them with a pale shroud ; probably the brigands of the valleys looked down on them from the flanking hills and cursed because they were many and armed. And so at length, after hours of this wearisome climbing, they came to the white houses of Bethany lying amid oaks and olives, almond trees and pomegranates,

with the ridge of Olivet behind dark against the setting-sun ; and here they found the colt and the ass tethered in the field, and also, it may be, certain of Christ's followers waiting and peering down into the long shadows of the valley for their master. We know what followed, and how, when the crowd of tired pilgrims had climbed the last slopes of Olivet, they burst into raptures at the sight of the Holy City lying before them across the valley of Jehoshaphat.

Jerusalem, as it is seen to-day from the neighbouring ridge, is probably not so very dissimilar from the city that Christ looked down upon. Gone, of course, are the vast white walls and golden roof of the Temple, the palaces of Herod and the Macca-bees, the fortification of Antonia, and many another large building long dissolved into dust ; there are great gaps of vacant, rubbish-strewn land among the residential quarters, where of old so tightly were the houses packed that ventilation was little better than a name ; and the Dome of the Rock and a score of minarets speak plainly of the Turk ; but to the Oriental time is as nothing, and Oriental cities change little in essentials. Greeks and Romans and Osmanlis have burnt and razed and built anew without altering the main features, which are, indeed, largely determined by the comparatively immutable limitations of nature. Walls and towers still compactly enclose the city upon its hills ; within its streets camels and asses still jostle a brightly-coloured, noisy, cosmopolitan crowd ; and

every night its five gates are closed and barred as they have been closed and barred these four thousand years and more.

The city is built on limestone rock, 2,600 feet above the sea. It has been besieged no fewer than seventeen times, and practically destroyed on each occasion ; and the modern Jerusalem stands on a remarkable foundation, thirty or forty feet deep, consisting largely of the débris of the temples and palaces and houses so repeatedly demolished, and so repeatedly and patiently restored. In these days the city is shrunk in size, and a great part of it is uninhabited, but in the time of Christ, if we are to believe Josephus, within its area of little more than one mile square were crowded 200,000 resident inhabitants. Of course, Orientals alone would submit to such congestion, and this number can hardly ever have been exceeded, for the town never spread beyond its outer walls, now disappeared. The houses were very large, however, frequently of several stories ; they occupied every yard of space not required for the Temple and the various palaces ; and the highly irregular nature of the site permitted of more crowding than would have been possible on the flat. But if the city was small, it was, at least in the times of its prosperity, magnificent, and perhaps more magnificent in the time of Christ than ever before. Herod the Great, with his Greek ideas, his Greek friends, and his Greek architects, conceived and executed such works as Solomon had never dreamed

of. First among these was the Temple. On the site of Zerubbabel's humble fane he reared up a beautiful structure of white marble and gold, its outer fortified wall, said to be the finest example of mural masonry in the world, more than 100 feet in height; its inner buildings and cloisters rising in places another 80 feet above this, and joined, in a manner worthy of itself, by an immense bridge, 350 feet long, to the fortified palace of the Maccabees on the further side of the Valley of Tyropœon. It is almost needless to add that the dimensions of the area thus covered are not exactly known; but it may perhaps have attained 900 feet square. It was intended to be a fortress as well as a temple; and immediately within the great walls a wide court, answering to the bailey or courtyard of a castle, extended round the whole circuit, completely surrounding the small central courts and the Sanctuary itself, which took the place of the keep. This outer court was known as the Court of the Gentiles. It was open to all the world, and was employed as a sort of market-place. Here, as in Old St. Paul's, the money-changers waited for their clients, here were the sellers of doves and lambs, here the Rabbis disputed and expounded amid a clamour of many tongues. Well might Christ call it a den of thieves. In the centre rose the walls which hid the small courts of the Jews, two in number, one for women and one for men, and the innermost Court of the Priests. Within this, like the kernel in a nut, stood

the Sanctuary itself ; the great stone altar of sacrifice before its porch. This Sanctuary was of moderate size, consisting within of one apartment divided into two unequal portions by a veil or curtain. Of these the larger was the Holy Place, where stood the Golden Altars of Incense and of Shewbread, and the seven-branched Golden Candlestick, which was always lighted night and day. The smaller division of the Sanctuary—the Holy of Holies—was completely empty. For 364 days of the year no man passed within the sacred curtain : only on the Day of Atonement, when the sins of the people were expiated, the High Priest went alone within to intercede for them with the Most High.

Such was the Temple of Herod, the largest, the most magnificent, the most truly beautiful temple Palestine has seen. It was not actually completed until Herod had been dead sixty years ; yet another six, and the soldiers of Titus were cheering among its smoking ruins.

In the eyes of the world, no less than in those of the Jews, the Temple was the great beauty of Jerusalem ; but under the Herods there were many other beautiful buildings ; so many, in fact, that it has been described as a city of palaces. Greek artists and architects embellished the erections, more useful than lovely, of the earlier Hasmonians ; and without the walls, among the gardens that surrounded them, there arose, to the horror of pious Jews, a vast amphitheatre, where wild beasts

and gladiators fought for their lives. In fact, a Græco-Roman atmosphere permeated the life of the city. Greek philosophers and rhetoricians sat at the king's table with Scribes and Pharisees; Greek sophists contended with scandalized Rabbis in the Court of the Gentiles; Greek mercenaries swaggered about the streets and took the wall from the scowling owners of the land. The exclusive city was thrown open to all the influences of the West. Herod was too shrewd and skilful to allow these elements to obtrude too obnoxiously into his capital, whatever he might allow in friendly Sebaste; but to keep them and his own people in formal amity his strong hand was wanted. With his death the reins were relaxed; quarrels and riots were springing up daily in this or that quarter of the city; the fanatics, crushed by his hand, were reindued with energy; the Hellenized party of the Scribes began to doubt, and finally came to loathe, their alien acquirements. The inimical forces were seething and muttering, and the inevitable end was not far off. Christ did not need to tarry long in the city to perceive it. "In your patience," said he to his disciples; "possess ye your souls. And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh . . . Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled . . ."

Many of those to whom he spoke, who possessed their souls in patience, lived to see the legions of Titus closing round the Holy City, even as he had said.

PART II

CHRIST

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY ENVIRONMENT OF CHRIST

I

WHEN Christ was born Julius Cæsar had been dead forty years : fifty-one years had passed since he had landed in Britain, on the Kentish coast near Dover ; and the city of Rome was alleged to be 749 years old. A vast change, whose effects are felt to-day, was taking place in the balance of the old world ; and it is only in accordance with the fitness of things that the greatest of the children of men should have been born at such a time. For it was not the world's religious opinions alone that were in a state of flux. Its political systems had been violently subverted, and it was as yet far from feeling secure in the new order of things. The tread of Alexander's phalanx had shaken the East to fragments : the Hannibalic war had changed forever the fortunes of the West ; but East and West

alike were involved in the civil struggles of the Roman military rulers, alike had followed breathlessly the fortunes of Pompey and Cæsar, Antony and Octavian, alike now lay crushed, helpless, and ill at ease beneath the heel of the New Monarchy. Augustus Cæsar, after conquering in succession Brutus and Cassius, Antony and Cleopatra, Lepidus and Sextus Pompey, had been for twenty-six years absolute master of an Empire which stretched from the English Channel to the Sahara, and from the Atlantic to the Caspian.

A great age with its great men seemed to have passed away with Julius Cæsar. The Roman world was changing its entire mode of life ; and periods of recovery after great revolutions seldom father great men or great events. Both, as it happened, were in this case at hand ; but the future was closed, and for the moment comparative mediocrity seemed to occupy the stage. Yet many who were to act respectable parts as the drama developed were among the contemporaries of Christ. Augustus himself, cold, clement, and politic, far-seeing in little things, but blind to greater issues, does not make a fascinating or even arresting figure when looked at down the long perspectives of time and history ; but his unparalleled position of power clothed him in his day with vicarious glory and pomp. He was now in his fifty-ninth year. His adopted successor, the gloomy and terrible Tiberius, who was to outlive Christ by three years, was then just twenty-nine. The three sons of Herod the

Great who had survived his various decimations of his family, Philip, Archelaus, and Antipas, were respectively about nineteen, eighteen, and seventeen. Philo, the Jew of Alexandria, whose well-meant literary speculations were to influence so unfortunately future theological adventures in general, and the fourth Gospel in particular, was then somewhere between twenty and thirty. Seneca had just been born: the birth of the insane Caligula was to take place within fifteen years, that of Pliny the Elder within twenty-seven; while, to come nearer home, there was also born before the death of Christ one Boadicea, Queen of the Iceni in the island of Britain.

In reviewing the comparative abundance of our knowledge of these and other more obscure contemporaries of Christ, whose glories, as it took little time to prove, were mostly "shadows, not substantial things," and who live with us now only as the pantomime puppets of the historian; and considering, for the moment, not quality but quantity of matter; no one can fail to be struck by the startling contrast of the few poor fragments that have come down to us of the life of Christ himself. Of the man who undertook and actually accomplished the tremendous task of reforming the world, and who lives, and will continue to live, with many of us as a personality as real as any friend or kinsman—of how this man spent the most important years of his life no single scrap of circumstantial evidence has survived. Tradition chatters

absurdly of this and of that ; but history is silent. The first thirty years of his life are historically an utter blank. We are only just extricating ourselves from a muddle concerned with the very year of his birth ; we do not know where he was born ; and we quarrel as to how and why he was born. Perhaps we have done well to make the most of his birth ; for a curtain immediately descends upon his life, and we hear nothing more until he comes forth from Nazareth, a grown man, to teach. We have lost out of his life a part that is only less priceless than the words and acts of his last four years : the story of what made him what he became. From out of the shadows and dust and cerements of that lifeless past we hear the music of his words, distantly, like a clear ringing bell ; and we hear the peals falling, falling through the ages towards us ; but while we can identify a thousand other paltry figures in the catacombs of history, the speaker himself, the most perfect human figure of them all, our mind's-eye cannot even see. If we know him at all, it is with the soul's imagination.

It is commonly supposed that Christ passed his first thirty recordless years—those years of infinite value during which, in St. Luke's words, he “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”—working in his father's carpenter's shed in the village of Nazareth. It is supposed that in this valley, where the cycle of eventless days would be broken only by some Passover journey to Jerusalem, or some business or pleasure walk to

the Lake of Gennesareth, his mind was growing, his opinions forming, his outlook widening. That here he was acquiring his profound knowledge of human nature, of beauty, of sorrow and of sin, his strength of will and serenity of mind, and his infinite understanding of the love of God, which taught him to discard so completely all thought for the morrow, and to resign himself to that Divine waywardness which bloweth where it listeth. That here he learnt to be all things to all men, to be tolerant in an intolerant country, to be wide-minded among a bigoted people, to look at life with the most catholic discernment. That here, above all, he came to realize in himself, and learnt subsequently to train and to control, the higher laws of Nature—the laws which govern the spiritual captaincy of the body, and through which alone he was able to heal the sick and feed the hungry.

The more we consider this catalogue of gifts, the more incredible it appears that they could be so perfectly developed in a small agricultural village of Galilee. Many of them, in fact, imperatively demand for their very inception a varied and extended intercourse with the wider world of men. Of course, if we regard them as "gifts" in the ordinary doctrinal sense, as attributes miraculously dispensed complete to Christ alone of all mankind; if, that is, we regard Christ as the Incarnate Word of the fourth Gospel, inquiry becomes at once superfluous. Upon this hypothesis all things are possible. But if we prefer to think of Christ simply

as an exceptional man, predestined from his birth to undergo the universal processes of human nature, processes which, when he spoke of "the blade, and then the ear, and then the corn in the ear," he himself acknowledged; then this widely-accepted theory appears, to say the very least, unsatisfactory. We can all imagine objections to it; and perhaps not the least potent is that involved in the silence of the Gospel writers on the subject. This silence is unanimous and remarkable. In later times, notwithstanding that by then the conception of Christ's miraculous origin was established as a canon of the Church, the difficulty was appreciated; and there came into being a number of apocryphal gospels purporting to deal with his childhood. But our only three reputable witnesses, not to mention the highly-fanciful compilers of the Gospel according to St. John, have no word to say about these vital years.

It has to be remembered that the larger part of the synoptic Gospels was written down some time after the events described, from the collections of Christ's words and deeds which were treasured up in the memories of his followers; and it seems absurd to suppose that the compilers made no endeavour to learn something of the early life of the man they loved and venerated. There remains the conclusion that they are silent either because they could find out nothing, and were too conscientious to invent, or because what little they could unearth was coupled with some express restriction by Christ

himself, limiting any future recorders of his life to the story of his active ministry. Either explanation would be accounted for by the view which will presently be adumbrated as to how these mysterious years were spent ; but in the light of the common theory the silence of the evangelists is altogether inexplicable. Let us look at the facts rationally. Nazareth, the home of Christ, where he is supposed to have spent these years, lies less than twenty miles to the westward of the Lake of Gennesareth or Galilee, the scene of so much of his later public life. On this lake's western shore lay, among other Jew and Gentile towns, Capernaum, which he was to make his headquarters ; and it was from among the dwellers in these towns that he selected his first disciples. It is only reasonable to suppose that most of these men had lived in that region all their lives—had lived, that is to say, within twenty miles of the place where Christ is alleged to have spent no less than thirty years ; and yet they seem to know nothing of him. They have heard no rumour of a remarkable young man living in Nazareth. The scanty references to those people from Nazareth itself or its neighbourhood who did know something of Christ and his parents show how astonished they were by his extraordinary powers. "Is not this the son of Joseph?" they ask in bewilderment ; "Is not this the carpenter's son . . . ? Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works?" Even his own family were startled and sceptical. They had no knowledge of

these powers. Their son and brother was become a transcendent being whom they could not understand, and of whom they were inclined to be scornful or afraid. For thirty years we are to believe he lived in the same house with them, and, apart from one possible instance of precocity, betrayed to them not one sign of the growth of his unequalled genius. We have no authority for supposing that those sayings of his which his mother loved to treasure up in her heart were anything more than the clever sayings of ordinary boys which all mothers love to remember and repeat. And, after all, it is not his boyhood but his early manhood that is important ; and dare we suppose that a young man could or would conceal, between (let us say) his twentieth and thirtieth years, every vestige of gifts so remarkable ?

Such difficulties may perhaps be met with the suggestion that Christ himself knew nothing of these gifts until he was baptized of John. We are to conceive of a hidden growth and a sudden revelation. But this is little better than the theory of miraculous birth and dispensation ; and many of us cannot accept it. For in Nature things do not happen in this way. There is no spontaneous generation. A man may discover late in life one latent gift, but not a score ; and even that one, however material in power, would be untrained and at first all but useless.

The striking thing about Christ is not only that his gifts are supreme, but that they are supremely

developed. Year by year he must have been absorbing knowledge, studying humanity, conquering himself. Year by year his environment must have been hardening his ideals. Year after year his vast capacity for love must have been deepening, widening, seeking new outlets ; passing in turn the love of women, the love of parents, even the love of race ; until it took within its boundless depths all nations and all creeds. When he came to be baptized of John the work was done. It was doubtless John who first saw in Christ the fulfilment of his own predictions, and first showed him the immense task to whose achievement he, alone of all mankind, was equal ; but John did no more than indicate the end. The means were already perfected with a finish only wide and profound experience could have wrought. The lamp to which Christ compared himself was fashioned : the oil was purchased—at what cost we may not guess ; the wick was trimmed. And to this completed instrument there came the flint and steel of that which we call revelation.

It seems quite impossible that the environment required for this perfection was to be found in any one village in Judea, or even in all Judea itself. The genius that was in Christ might grow well and steadily in a quiet and limited environment up to a point ; but after that point was reached a change was essential. It is well for the child to live and grow and learn in peace ; but what of the man ? What of the years between fifteen and thirty—the

years that make or mar? What could they have made of Nazareth? What, in the case of Bunyan the Tinker, did Elstow do for him? Are we not justified in believing that it was not his life in this quiet village, but his two years soldiering in the Parliamentary army, his marriage, and his subsequent sufferings, that informed his untamed genius with the stuff of which "The Pilgrim's Progress" is made? And in the case of Christ, whose gifts were so infinitely various and were carried to such infinite perfection, the facts demand some adequate infinity of environment. Some of them could be matured in a village; for most of them, or so it seems to me, the length and breadth of all Palestine could not supply sufficient nourishment.

Some such reasoning as this—if mere speculation working backwards, from the end to the means, may shelter under the name—makes it seem possible that our inherited and ingrained ideas of Christ's early life are wholly erroneous. By no natural means could the man we know have sprung from the environment we are asked to accept. Peace and monotony, unhappily, are poor agents of insight; and it is not within the scope of a country village to train such other powers as Christ possessed. For these, the world were not too large a school; and yet people would put him in a cave.

It seems that they forget many things: they forget, among others, the fact that at the back of all human wisdom lies suffering. The more a man suffers, the more, if he has vision, he will learn. It may not

avail, but the failure will lie at his own door ; for a great shock acts like a new birth ; it runs like a knife across the old existence ; and he may, if he will, start life again from the beginning. We are so constituted that we learn more from those disasters we know we have deserved than from those which seem cruelly gratuitous ; but our merits and the nature of the blow are alike immaterial ; for suffering works by constant laws, on the just and on the unjust. But the loftier the genius of the sufferer, the more new aspects of life should he discover, and the deeper within them should he see. His ideas are likely to be recast one by one. Things which have been long tolerated or condoned will appear nauseous ; and a thousand other facets of life which have been as long unheeded or misunderstood, will become the very salt of living. The wonder will shine in the great things and the small : in the long drawn out beauty of a human love no less than in those swift choking moments when we stand breathless before the beauty of the setting sun, before a few stars flickering, like God's eyes, through the stripped and restless tracery of an oak, or before some cottage casement framing grey and silver seabirds that wheel and rock and flash across a grey and silver sky. . . . Even to the dullest perhaps some little thing over which he has long puzzled his poor wits, or for which he has even ceased to care, will become in that instant as clear and lovable as midsummer sunshine.

The whole process by which suffering achieves its

end is outlined for all time in the inimitable parable of the prodigal son. And yet there is a common belief, which has been stated in so many words, that Christ in his earlier years had no personal acquaintance with the ordinary forces which work upon the human soul—the love of men and women, the treachery of friends, temptation, evil and the eternal laws of sorrow. He learnt all these things, we are to understand, instinctively. But what authority have we for supposing anything of the kind? If we were to hear the words of Christ in the mouth of another man, we should declare unhesitatingly that such a man must know the world (in our modern phrase) and have suffered greatly for his knowledge. What right have we to conclude that Christ, who so persistently identifies himself with mankind, was not as other men in this? Surely it must add greatly to the vitality of his image in our thoughts if we can believe him to be one who suffered as we suffer; who paid for his infinite knowledge as we pay for our small learning. Just as we cannot reconcile the eager, active, masterful figure who lives again in the Apostles' narratives with the village-bred mystic of the popular imagination, so it also seems impertinent to suppose that when Christ spoke of love and temptation and sorrow, he was speaking of things which he knew only as abstract ideas, which in his own person he had never experienced, which were really meaningless to him because he was above them. He was indeed then far above them; but

he had climbed up the same ladder of experience we all profess to appreciate so well and yet misuse so lamentably. He was not the greatest of men because he did not know these things, but because he had known them ; because he had remembered and risen where we, without exception, forget and fall.

On these accounts one is inclined to think that at the back of Christ's early life lies much suffering ; suffering hidden as successfully then from his parents and friends as it is hidden from us now. It may have been a long drawn out and cumulative sorrow, or some violent shock that snapped instantly all the threads of his old life, all his personal emotions and desires ; but either way his knowledge, his love and his pity are such as could only have come through suffering. His love had grown from pain : his sympathy with the stricken and tempted was not the sympathy of inspired benevolence ; it was the sympathy of one who also knew. He was perhaps the first, as he was undoubtedly the greatest of thinkers to master what we may call the science of mental suffering and evil. He did not attempt to fight them with other weapons as so many foolish people try ; he used them against themselves. He knew that they were only a means to some end, here or hereafter ; and to expedite that end he took them into his own hands and wrought with them with an artist's genius. His knowledge of women, again, was profound ; and his attitude towards them was particularly remark-

able in an age when women (and not only in the Orient) were very lightly regarded. The results of this attitude are now universally felt and gratefully acknowledged ; but few people, it seems, have dared to suggest that this attitude was the outcome of anything more than a divine instinct. Instinct will do much, but it is fallible ; and to build a house on instinct without experience is to build it on sand.

In its more general application the teaching of sorrow is to be seen in the breadth and originality of Christ's vision. He treated no two things or two people alike. He has some new charm for every ill, some new apt definition of every aspect of the kingdom he came to interpret, some new road by which it can be entered to show to the most degraded. Many of those things we love to think are virtues he lashed with his contempt. His parables are as inimitable in their originality and truth as in their beauty ; for knowledge had trained his artistic instinct to fasten unerringly upon the point that mattered. One feels that everything he had ever seen was treasured up in his mind against some possible occasion for its use ; and but little can have escaped his eye. Remembering this, those who hold that wisdom came to him as he worked year after year in the carpenter's shop, may note that this master of metaphor, who drew his illustrations from the whole world about him, does not appear to have drawn so much as one from that trade at which he is supposed to have laboured for

fifteen or twenty years, and with every aspect and circumstance of which, by this hypothesis, he should have been familiar as he could have been familiar with nothing else.

Such is at least a rational argument for the natural development of this side of Christ's character. Farther we cannot desire to go. That which he wished forgotten is no concern of ours. It is enough to believe that he was led through life as we are led through it, enjoying, learning, and suffering. And by remembering how our own imperfect natures can be altered out of recognition by the suffering they undergo, we can perhaps more clearly realize how profound, in his own case, the result of a great sorrow must have been. For in his wonderful soul it found such a field to work on as it has never elsewhere found in men. All that it has to do for us, the natural love and intelligence it has to enliven and keep in being, it found already grown to their full stature in his nature ; and where we are lucky if in the end we pick up a few scraps of the wisdom that hangs on sorrow's heels, he could at once acquire it all. This was the appointed climax of his long training. The world had done its work ; and God sent sorrow to cut away the old trappings and endue His messenger with that without which righteousness is of little avail. Christ himself must have felt that all was done : and, still in ignorance of his destiny, but feeling it to lie before him in his own country, he turned his steps once more to Nazareth.

II

Laughter and tears, happiness and sorrow, all the promiscuous human influence of the outer world, might confirm and temper the character of Christ ; but he possessed gifts which required for their consummation training of a more restricted and definite type. Such were his artistic gifts and the gift of spiritual control over matter. These, and particularly the latter thorny subject, fall to be considered here.

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The Oriental has always found it extraordinarily difficult to call a spade a spade. He instantly sees this humble article in a dozen different disguises, and discovers a dozen natural or strained analogies to its duties. His imagination is so luxuriant and unrestrained that his beautiful invention, the parable, frequently gets beyond his control, and obscures where its duty is to clarify. In the Old Testament this form of expression is largely practised, sometimes in its perfection, sometimes with an elaboration that borders on the ridiculous. In either case, the sacred Jewish books are typical of the Oriental mind. In them no man is distressed in spirit but he feels that his eyes are seared and blinded by his tears, that his bones are coming through his skin, that his body is covered with ulcers, that his enemies are lying about in wait to destroy him, that the eagles are gathering above to peck out his eyes, that his God is implacably enraged with him and that some

terrestrial cataclysm is approaching in which he will infallibly be annihilated. It never occurs to him to moderate the expression either of his sorrow, his anger or his joy. His emotions intoxicate him so swiftly and completely that he ransacks Heaven and Earth for similes which will adequately represent them; and beautiful as many of these metaphors are undoubtedly, simplicity of diction or idea is seldom their most marked characteristic. Their imagery is frequently splendid; but it is not often art.

It would have been strange had Christ failed to utilise in his teaching a form of expression which lent itself admirably to his designs, which was in common use among his audience, and which his artistic sense must have valued at its great intrinsic merit. One seldom, however, hears a comment upon the fact that in his hands, like everything else he touched, the Oriental parable became a new thing. People are wilfully blind to the artistic debt we owe him in this respect. Yet a comparison of his language with the language of the Psalms, of the Song of Solomon, of the Books of Job and the Prophets, shows him to be artistically, no less than temperamentally, poles asunder from the Old Testament writers. Where they are diffuse, he is concise; where they are vague, he is exact; where they are sometimes coarse, he is always beautiful; where their comparisons are frequently elaborate and strained, his are invariably natural and apt. They were often recklessly profuse of words; but

his phrases bear the marks of restraint and selection. He did not liken the Kingdom of Heaven to impossible cities of jasper and lazulite, with gates made of single pearls and streets of gold; nor to seas of glass surrounded by impossible beasts full of eyes before and behind. He did not picture Satan as a dragon with seven heads and ten horns, in the likeness at one and the same time of a leopard, a bear, and a lion. For these gorgeous extravagances, so typically Oriental, are like the dreams of children, who have imagination but no sense of proportion, and to whose minds the unknown always suggests the terrific and bizarre. They have not learnt that art lies in sobriety, not in excess; and that the truths of nature, soberly handled, make far more effective and beautiful illustrations than all the grotesque conceptions of the human mind. They think in superlatives; and they believe exceptions, and not rules, to be the things that matter.

It is surely remarkable that there is no trace of this attitude of mind in Christ. It is surely impossible to believe that he could have freed himself so completely from the Orientalism of his country if he had remained for thirty years in an Oriental village. There are other considerations, which, when all allowance has been made for supreme genius and for what may be called the "editing" of his words by the later compilers and their authorities, call for some more adequate explanation of the divergence of his methods from all the canons of the East.

In reviewing the matter, we are at once faced by

the inevitable comparison between the Orientals and the Greeks. We should not insist unduly upon the Greek influence, the effects of which may as easily be exaggerated as they are ordinarily undervalued ; but these people were not only the most numerous and prominent Western representatives in Asia : they had also been the representatives, in their day, of the high-water mark of Occidental as opposed to Oriental art. By the time of Christ the whole nation was deeply decayed : its taste and morals were alike indifferent ; and it had succumbed in part to Oriental ideas, just as the Orientals had succumbed in part to its own charm. But its contribution to human art was permanent and inimitable ; and at its best its workmanship was characterized by the attainment of that incalculable mean at which the artist, avoiding on the one hand the simplicity which becomes crude, and on the other hand the elaboration which becomes vulgar, produces a thing of natural and obvious beauty. The art of the Greeks was based on nature ; and even in their theology they did not people their heaven with dragons, but saw it rather as a terrestrial paradise, in which the most uncouth beings were a few satyrs and centaurs. Their whole system of thought in its essentials was the system all artistic countries and individuals have since adopted ; and it was the system of Christ.

Christ's mind, in effect, was Occidental, not Oriental. He saw further than the Greeks saw, and he carried their principles of art infallibly to the

true conclusion ; but his mode of expression, his knowledge of balance and appreciation of style, as disclosed in his conciseness, his repression of all redundancies, his selection of words and ideas, and his dramatic vivacity of manner, are essentially Greek and Occidental in substance, and could only have been based upon a Greek training. This is the crucial point. In regarding Christ as supremely gifted, as he was, people think that his gifts sprang of themselves full-bloom into flower ; but in fact these artistic gifts, no less than those of character with which we have dealt, demand a definable course of training. The gift of words is one of the most difficult to handle with discretion. No intuition can tell a man when he is too diffuse or too concise ; when he is too bald in method or when too picturesque. The hundred aspects of style, whether in the written or spoken word, are not to be learned without a considerable knowledge of the accumulated labours of those who have gone before. Whether of intent or involuntarily, the faculty must be trained. The village genius, the mute, inglorious Milton, the Galilean peasant, can never learn in their own homes to become masters of style. Such masters can be numbered on the fingers of two hands ; and one of them is Christ.

For this reason it seems probable that he was acquainted, and well acquainted, with Greek literature and rhetoric. There is no need to suppose that he ever entered one of the degenerate Greek schools of philosophy or art which then abounded ;

but it has been plausibly suggested that some Rabbi—perhaps one who had heard his precocious arguments in the Temple—was struck by his abnormal powers, took him in hand while he was still a boy, and educated him in the considerable learning of the Rabbinical schools. In such a fashion he would acquire not only his knowledge of the Hebrew language and literature, but a grounding in Greek literature as well ; and by no stretch of probability can we assume his parents to have instructed him in these things. This training would probably necessitate residence in Jerusalem : it might extend over a good number of years ; and it would be likely to bring to Christ sufficient experience of the cosmopolitan world to determine him to see more of it before he made up his mind about that future which his Rabbinical guides had doubtless mapped out for him, but to which, perhaps, his inclinations were already opposed. It could not have taken long for him to detect the hypocrisy of the Jewish theological mind. Nor could his artist's soul have remained cold to the Greek fascination ; and he must have wished to know more of that people and their literature than the superficial Western culture of Jerusalem could show him. However the orthodox Jew might shrink from the pollution of the Gentile cities, we can hardly believe Christ to have been bound by this bigotry : such a mind as his would never have been satisfied with so poor a reflection when the real thing lay close at hand ; and once

out of Judea itself he could take his choice of a dozen or more cities within a few days' journey, in which the children of Hellen, however degenerate, had not yet sunk below the appreciation of the masters of their art. We have already seen how his own home at Nazareth lay little more than twenty miles from Gadara, celebrated for its general culture and as the birthplace of Menippus the satirist, of Meleager the first Greek anthologist, of Philodemus the Epicurean philosopher and poet, and of Theodorus the rhetorician, who numbered among his pupils the Emperor Tiberius. Pella, again, with which Christ is actually connected by legend, the home of the Christians who fled from Jerusalem before the legions of Titus and Hadrian, the headquarters of the first Jewish-Christian church, lay close at hand. West of Pella was Scythopolis, an important city in Christ's day, having many temples, a theatre, a hippodrome, and a strongly-fortified acropolis; where, thirty years after his death, the Greek and Canaanitish inhabitants massacred all their Jewish fellow-townsmen. Further afield lay the rest of the Decapolis and the Greek towns along the coast, such as Ascalon, the home of the eclectic philosopher Antiochus, the tutor of Cicero; and without the boundaries of Palestine, but at no great distance as distance was counted in those days of leisurely travel, there were Antioch, the Syrian capital and the future home of the earliest purely Christian Church, Damascus with its vast mixed population, and even Alexandria,

then perhaps engaged in replenishing in some sort the terrible gaps in its library caused by the Cæsarian battles and fires. So wide and varied and yet attainable at all points was the magic circle around Judea : so securely, as it seemed—so superficially, as it was to prove, had the West flung its net over the East ; and the eager but discerning student could progress from point to point along the brilliant, fragile mesh, selecting, approving, or condemning ; could watch, if he wished, the boxing, the wrestling and the dancing classes, the chariot-races and the contests between gladiators and lions ; or, turning aside from these amusements, could study Plato and Aristotle, Homer and Æschylus and Sophocles, and could compare the masters of the past with the meretricious sophists and philologists of the later Athens and Alexandria.

Some training of this character Christ may have undergone. But this could not be all : there remained in him a faculty which neither Greek art nor Greek philosophy could nourish or perfect ; a faculty whose students and masters shrank further and further back before the influence of the impatient West into that remote East in whose sands even the mighty footsteps of Alexander were effaced as soon as they were made.

The miracles of Christ and of his immediate followers have been the butt of the cynic, the stumbling-block of the doubter, and the unstudied comfort of the pious for nearly two thousand years. It is not long since the claims of the innumerable

multitude of early Christian saints to miraculous powers were universally accepted ; but this belief has been steadily waning in Europe, from the days when the rood of Boxley and the bones of St. Thomas submitted with ignominy to their destroyers, to those in which Gibbon's famous fifteenth chapter electrified the pious world. In the last century the unparalleled advance of philosophy and its conquests in all branches of science appeared to set the cap on the rationalist theories ; and the balance swung definitely to the other side. There arose a tendency among thinking people to refuse admittance to everything which could not be resolved into algebraic formulæ : scepticism became one of the fashions ; and while the later miraculous saints and relics disappeared finally and deservedly into the company of Cagliostro and Nostradamus, the circumstantial performances of Christ himself were submitted to the microscope and apparently found wanting. A reaction has since taken place ; and a small but increasing band of people recognize that science, so far from invalidating his claims, has verified them ; that some miracles are not illusions, but natural phenomena ; and that there have always been individuals, one here and one there, in meagre but continuous succession, who, working along the same lines as Christ, could do in their own small way what his supreme powers enabled him to perform almost without stint.

The laws of the spirit, which the West has just discovered as if they were some new thing, and over

which it is so pleased that it welcomes without scrutiny every impostor who practises in their name, have been sedulously studied in the East from time immemorial. Our magicians of the middle ages took their name from the Magi of Persia, the Zoroastrian priests, who were supposed to possess—and, for all we know, may have possessed—certain extraordinary powers; but all the Oriental peoples, with their limitless patience, were peculiarly qualified to study a subject which requires the exercise of that faculty in an almost superhuman degree. They have proved that mere human wisdom and patience, so practised, can accomplish the definite victory of spirit over matter; their knowledge is at last penetrating into the West; and the tricks of Indian jugglers, no less than the meaningless phenomena of spiritualists and some even of the unprofessional “ghosts” and visions, which we doubt from habit even when we see them, are found to be reflections, feeble and degraded, of the fundamental truth upon which Christ and so many lesser teachers have insisted—that the laws of the spirit transcend the laws of the flesh.

The gift of healing, which figures so prominently in the Gospels, is the supreme application of this principle in the physical world, and in this form it is coming to be recognised and practised in the West. We are still, however, children on the threshold of a science whose age in the Orient is numbered by millenniums, and centuries may well elapse before the Western temperament adjusts

itself to an alien point of view. The process is necessarily tentative and slow, and is confused and delayed by the dense outcrop of impostors. Sober and sceptical people are not to be converted by organizations of fraud and folly erected—as so many similar organizations have been erected—upon a foundation of truth ; still less will they be attracted by absurd societies and seances, whose common aim is the financial betterment of their promoters, the “esoteric psychics” of Bond Street, and the rabble of “professors” and “doctors” whose only qualifications are those supplied by their own effrontery and the gullibility of their followers. But behind all this uproar, despite the contempt which they are obliged to share with the charlatans who work in their name, a number of individuals are seeking knowledge, not on their own behalf but to assist others, and a small but sufficient measure of success is rewarding their efforts. Things which were laughed at a short time ago, the sub-conscious memory, telepathy, the force of suggestion, all types of the great principle, are recognised phenomena ; and the actual spiritual control of the body is within the reach of a few. This power may be limited to a few elementary personal acts, and even then may require a degree of faith and patience far beyond the attainment of the majority ; but the principle is established ; there is, or should be, no mystery about it ; and the mere mental understanding or recognition of it should at once provide a foundation for belief in some of the

miracles of Christ, and show many of his misunderstood or disputed sayings to be the simple expressions of a great natural law. If we cannot at this date disentangle fact from legend in the story of the miracles, we need not doubt the existence of a substratum of truth.

Thus he was uttering a literal truth when he said : " If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed and cast into the sea ; it shall be done, and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." And so again : " According to your faith be it unto you. Fear not, only believe ; all things are possible to him who believeth." It is in this last that our difficulty lies ; not in the moving of mountains or in the cure of sickness, but in the limited human capacity for belief. Like all other human faculties, the faith of understanding varies in capacity with the quality of its possessor : great men will be able to believe greatly and achieve great things, and simple, trustful men will sometimes find their " blind faith," if based upon love, no less efficacious ; the capacity of these differs only in degree from the supreme capacity of Christ. But most of us are neither great nor simple. We do not understand by prayer and fasting such a state as Christ implied. He meant that love of God and humanity in which he, alone of men, truly may be said to have lived and moved and had his being, and he meant further a power of unselfish but complete detach-

ment from material interests, for which, even if one has the capacity, the opportunity is seldom forthcoming. In these days it is extraordinarily difficult to live for long "as upon a mountain," and at all times it must be the lot of many believers to be cast among people—whether their families or friends—who are not susceptible of the influence they feel themselves to possess. Christ himself in his own country "did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Yet faith brings its inevitable reward; and to those who possess it, be their chances of cultivating or applying its powers never so small, will be exemplified in various beautiful instances the truth which Christ embodied in the sayings "Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them," and "What I can do, ye can do also."

These words should be remembered. They were applied not as metaphor, nor to his immediate disciples whom he was addressing, but to mankind. "Freely ye have received," he said to the apostles whom he sent forth "to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease," "Freely give." The faculty which he possessed in such a supreme degree that he could endue others with it as he pleased, lies latent in us all. "Neither despise, nor oppose," says Penn. "What thou dost not understand," and although we may never receive the impulse which awoke the Twelve to the knowledge of their powers; although we are not likely to heal the sick or raise the dead; although mountains and trees will

not move or wither at our behest, we do not need on this account to deny the infinite possibilities of the human spirit, but for which we should not exist and about which we know nothing.

The common ignorance of mankind on this subject is broken here and there by a few great figures who, "by prayer and fasting," have arrived at some superficial knowledge of the secret. I say superficial because they cannot tell us of what the spirits consists, or of how it comes or goes, but only of certain of its functions and possibilities. They have proved in their own persons that it can command and control the physical body ; but by what agency it does this they cannot say. They are like workmen who have learnt by assiduous practice to use a delicate tool fashioned by a machinery of whose very nature they are ignorant. This science, which is of immense antiquity, has its home in the East ; it may have been initiated by the Magi or their national predecessors ; it may have come from China or India or Egypt ; in any event, the mantle of its discoverer is believed by many in these later days to have fallen in particular upon certain of the Buddhists. This contention, if we can forget for a moment that it too often serves as a cloak for the charlatan, affords ground for an interesting if extravagant speculation.

The followers of Gautama Buddha, more numerous than the followers of any other teacher or faith, are to be found over the whole of Western Asia, from the torrid to the frozen zone. To the

great majority, Buddhism represents no more than a system of theology, corrupt now as other systems are, and which they follow as blindly as the others are followed; but the more educated profess to have extracted from this mass of ritual a scheme of philosophy, which finds many adherents or students in the West; while a third phase, a wheel within these wheels, is found in the psychological wisdom which, as they swept over Asia, the Buddhists inherited from the original discoverers, whether the Magi or others. As a system of theology, this faith bears many inward and external marks of resemblance to Christianity; notably in the traditional deeds and sayings of Buddha, the monastic system, the worship of relics, the confession of sin and the papal attributes of its most noteworthy representative on earth, the Grand Lama of Thibet. Buddha was born no less than six hundred years before Christ: by the beginning of the Christian Era Buddhism had long been the state religion of India, and was spreading fast into those countries which were to be its refuge when India should discard it; and although the old Catholics liked to believe that Christianity inspired its forms and ceremonies, "it seems likely," to quote a modern writer, "that if there had been any connexion in the past, the younger religion had borrowed from the older." Any such borrowing, concerned as it is almost entirely with dogma and ritual, must have taken place some time anterior to the death of Christ;

and in any case, such speculations possess little value, for the outward forms of all religions are the composite growths of superstition and suggestion. Nor is it more useful to press too closely the analogies between the underlying fabrics of teaching. We need not suppose that Christ borrowed directly from Buddha, or Buddha from any of his predecessors: they severally represent progressive stages of human thought; and as there are not many kinds of truths, they differ more in the manner than the matter of their message. But in respect of that other wisdom—in the laws of the spirit—Christ's proficiency may justify us in suggesting that he was acquainted in some degree with Buddhist speculations and even with Buddhist teachers. If we suppose him to have become aware at an early age of the great powers he possessed, it would be only natural for him to wish them developed to no less a degree than his mental gifts; and while for the latter Palestine and the Hellenic colonies would suffice, he would find there no help towards the higher knowledge. In that ephemeral Græco-Asiastic world soothsayers from Chaldea or Essene dream diviners might gain credit with the vulgar, but intellect, and always intellect, was the cry of the learned; and once the intellect was satisfied or satiated, it had little else to offer. Yet although it was dead to any real form of spiritual life, although its members lived by sophisms and doctrines, it was in continual connexion with

another world, that further and greater East from which its own civilization was perhaps derived : a world whose vast and varied and leisured life was in nowise reflected in the semi-barbarous states, now Oriental, now Greek, now both at once, which rose and fell in wearisome multiplicity about the neutral lands between it and the West : a world whose temples and colleges and marts, from Ceylon to the Arctic circle, stood for a culture as alien to that of the Hellenic East as anything could well be : a world which Alexander dreamed of winning, but in which all his glory was no more than the fairy tales of travellers : a world where the fallacy of haste and worry and pure intellectual effort could still be understood ; and where " prayer and fasting " in the true sense had lifted its great men so near the light of wisdom that to their humbler fellows they seemed lost in the flame. Into this world, as into others, the historian had lagged behind the trader ; but while the West still lay dissolved in self-sufficient pride and ignorance, taking itself to be the universe, merchants from the Greek cities on the Euxine and from the caravans of Ecbatana were perhaps chaffering in Cathay or on the banks of the Ganges ; and where Greek art could penetrate into China, it is not perhaps absurd to suppose that Syria had heard rumours of magic in the East.

Into this further East it seems not impossible that Christ may have adventured, perhaps in definite search for that knowledge which was denied him

in his own country, perhaps with no such set intention in the first place, but merely that he might see the world. Time and distance were not likely to trouble him. It is a singular fact that in these days of rapid transit, when the advertisements of Messrs. Cook tell us that the East is at our doors, we make a great to-do about journeys which to the ancients would have seemed insignificant. Where we regard the Channel crossing as a serious undertaking, they thought nothing of leaving their homes and families for years at a time in order to transact business or to perform some pilgrimage. The great temples and seats of learning drew the pious, the studious and the inquisitive from all quarters of the globe. To mention two well-known instances, Herodotus, to collect materials for his history, travelled for years all over Asia, Europe, and Africa; and St. Paul seems to have contemplated a journey scarcely less extensive to visit the scattered churches of the early Christians. Poverty was no bar to the traveller in the East, although distances were great; for time was of no account, and the canons of hospitality were still respected; and a student such as we are supposing Christ to have been could set forth by caravan from Damascus or Petra, and paying for his passage, it may be, in various ways, he might penetrate by slow stages along the great trade route through Persia and Carmania to the Indus; and thence, passing Alexander's limit of the Hyphasis, he might reach the Ganges or even the Brahmaputra, might visit

the court of Patna or the monasteries of Ceylon, and might draw his allegory of the pearl merchant from the bazaars of Benares or the coast of Malabar.

Wild as such a flight of the imagination may appear, it is at least a significant fact that many Buddhists would not think it so. These people have studied the sayings of Christ, whom they reverence as a great teacher; and they believe him to have travelled in India, and to have become one of their initiates. The tale of his miracles, we are told, finds its parallels in the lives of their holy men or yogis. Among the rest they lay stress upon those cases in which Christ, attacked suddenly by angry mobs zealous to vindicate their orthodoxy upon his person, was able to "withdraw" himself unharmed from their midst into another place. This faculty, if we are to believe apparently credible witnesses, is far from extinct in the East; but it is only to be developed by a severe course of training—of that "prayer and fasting" of which Christ spoke. If we are prepared to grant that this and other "miracles" are within the region of possibility—and where so many truths are admittedly incomprehensible we should in justice preserve an open mind—then the necessity of some such process is hardly refutable; and it is difficult to believe that even such powers as Christ possessed could be perfected without it. The whole question, however, is too recondite and hypothetical to be touched more than lightly here; nor, happily, does it fall within

our province to consider the further Buddhist claim that Christ was a reincarnation of Buddha. Such suppositions, for what they are worth, are coming to be entertained in many minds ; but their value, where the whole problem is in so nebulous a state, lies in their indication of the trend of human thought and inquiry. The winds of opinion have veered out of their usual course, it may be only to die away, it may be to increase to hurricane force and shatter in a night the elaborate erections of twenty centuries ; and these things are no more than drifting straws which blow upon the first faint breezes out of the new quarter.

III

It is sincerely to be hoped that the foregoing will not be taken as an attempt to exalt human teaching and intellect at the expense of the incalculable forces of the spirit which lie within us all. The qualities of all men of genius are such as no system of training or experience can explain away. They are born, it seems, with knowledge and perceptions which we can only obtain after a life of trouble, if indeed we have obtained them then. They begin life where we end it. The story of Christ's precocity in the Temple, if true, is but one of a hundred similar instances of youthful genius which are as yet inexplicable. How his child's mind could grapple with the intricacies of the

Mosaic Law, how, at that age, he could feel so assured of his destiny in his Father's service, we cannot understand ; but neither can we understand how Chatterton could write the Rowley forgeries at fifteen, how Mill could declaim in Greek at eight, how Shakespeare could know so well countries which presumably he had never seen, and could analyse such various workings of the mind and spirit as in all human probability he could never himself have experienced.

The man of genius is found to start with a peculiar erratic quality of wisdom which neither habit nor rote would afterwards instil ; but the precocity of youth, however extraordinary, is always susceptible of the influence of time and experience. The character and gifts of Christ were so remarkable that it has seemed as if all human knowledge were his from the beginning ; but to accept this view is to accept in substance the theory of a peculiar divine origin. It is claimed here that there is as good a case for the other side. The gifts of Christ were infinitely greater than the gifts of other men of genius ; but he stood to these men as they stand to us, and his mission, greater as it was than the sum of theirs, required in him a process analogous on its own lofty plane to that which they pursue below : a process, inevitable to humanity, as he himself acknowledges, in which the means stand in constant proportion to the end, in which a man's work is the sum of his experience, however attained ; a process which insists that the later plays of Shake-

speare must be better than the earlier, that the work of Phidias and Raphael must be better in their prime than in their youth ; which insists, in short, that no human genius is too lofty to dispense with experience.

CHAPTER II

THE BEAUTY OF THE GOSPEL

I

IN the Græco-Roman world, by the time of Christ, the universal human longing for some comprehensible conception of God and the future state had resulted in the adoption of the most diverse and remarkable theologies. That world had come to think seriously about the human soul and to look forward with anything but equanimity to the future. It knew of many deities, ranging in capacity from terrific monsters, beyond the pale of human understanding, to unsatisfactory demi-gods under the control of an indefinable fate; from the Penates of Rome and the Grecian Hermæ to Jupiter Ammon and the Pessinuntine Cybele. Thinking men might appreciate this motley host at its true value, and might scoff in private at the credulous multitude; the augurs might smile to each other as they consulted the entrails, and blush when their random prophecies came true; but thinking and unthinking alike were nervous and unsettled, were hunting this way and that for some reliable belief at which to grasp, were experimenting every-

where with some new prophet and some novel and grotesque cult, and were finding everywhere complexity and indecision. Astronomers, necromancers, Chaldean soothsayers, the priests of the Cappadocian Ma and the Egyptian Isis and Osiris, were everywhere flourishing; and while a few philosophers might insist upon the power and eternity of the soul, and a few deists might turn with relief to the purer worship of Mithras, the mass were becoming embarrassed by their multitude of deities, all attractive in the beginning, all unsatisfactory in the end. The Unknown God and his kingdom, if such there were, seemed enveloped in so thick a cloud of mystery that the human soul was blinded and helpless before it.

Nevertheless, low as these tentative and shallow faiths had sunk one and all as time went on, in the depths of corruption they yet dwelt together in amity. No man in those days, unless he fell foul of the Jews, an insignificant division of his race, stood in much danger of suffering for his beliefs alone. Religious persecution, except as a political or social measure, was almost unknown. The Greek, the Roman, or the Persian might have evolved or adopted some particular mythology, suited to his tastes and needs; but each had come to admit that his neighbour's theory might be as near the truth as his own. There was no question as to any peculiar Divine sanction. There were no unseemly squabbles over supremacy or vestments or the interpretation of a phrase. Hard and pagan and

sceptical the men of that age might be ; but at least they lived together in religious peace. They might, and with justice, feel perturbed about the future, and fly from god to god for a remedy against unbelief ; but it entered into no man's mind that he should rack or burn or quarter his neighbour because the latter did not see eye to eye with him.

It must have been with a feeling of deep regret that Christ deliberately set out to demolish for ever this careless harmony. He saw to what evil it must lead, and how, on that score, it must be swiftly ended. His love of humanity, his love of God, his knowledge of his own powers and the sense of authority which that knowledge gave, impelled him irresistibly to save the world, in spite of itself, from that fate to which it was drifting with a light heart. To suppose that he began his task blindly, without method or ultimate aim, is to reduce him to the level of the ordinary well-meaning but mischievous prophet who, in order that he may protest against some form of corruption, cries out loudly at the wrong time, blunders, falls, and is obliterated. Christ made no mistakes. He knew well what his intrusion into that aimless, unbelieving world would mean. He saw further ahead than it has ever been given to any other man to see. One does not know whether to marvel most at the immensity of his task, at the faultless manner in which it was undertaken, or at the courage which could face it. He is never more wonderful than when he says, " I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to

set a man at variance against his father. . . . And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." Why, coming as he came with a story of great beauty to a harassed mankind, should he talk in this way? His immediate followers, mostly Jews themselves, thought he was referring to Jewish intolerance and bigotry and to the immediate future; but there can be no doubt that he saw a far wider field than Palestine and a far more distant future than any dreamt of by his disciples: he saw Europe and Asia, and perhaps the whole known world, for his field, and for the ultimate consummation of his work a day so remote that after nineteen centuries it seems no nearer at hand. And he saw, moreover, that his remedy, gentle and beautiful though it might seem as he showed it, would in other hands produce results only less terrible than the disease itself. He saw that the old must go, and that he alone of mankind was capable of ending it; but he saw also that it would be very long before the new was any better. He knew that he was replacing lethargy and decay by a new vital force that would presently wound and sear, bringing in its train massacre and war—not peace, but a sword. It is his manifest realization of these terrible first-fruits of his duty that makes the pathos and heroism of his life.

The rise of Christianity, as he foretold, has been a horrible business. In these days we look back upon the rack and the stake, upon Torquemada and Bonner and Micheli Ghislieri, and we thank Heaven

that we know better and are not as they. We assume we have cause for congratulation in that every man's religion is his own affair. And so indeed it is : so firmly has this new spirit of religious freedom seized us that the only limit to the number of new religions appears to be the number of the human race.

If we adopt for a moment a literary trick in growing usage since the days of Plato, and picture the arrival, let us say in this country, of some inquiring stranger from another planet, anxious, perhaps, to test that sauce or those many religions of which he has heard from Voltaire, we can only suppose that the latter feature at least would considerably startle him. He would be deafened by the clamour of conflicting creeds. A thousand strange sects, like hucksters about a market-place on fair-day, would advertise loudly their infallible nostrums for Heaven. Bishops and Brethren, Cardinals and Elders, the Ministers of tin Bethels and granite and marble cathedrals would embarrass him with their various definitions of the deity ; while on the other side would appear the grotesque phalanx of Positivists and Activists, Psychics and sham Buddhists, the followers of the latest German philosopher and the latest American humbug. Among this vociferous crowd he would discern faintly a few great and good men of all denominations uttering noble words and performing noble deeds ; but I think he could not fail to be disgusted and disheartened by the general uproar. He might, how-

ever, screw up his courage to ask this one and that the names of their various prophets and teachers, from whom they had imbibed such definite and conflicting notions ; and then he would be thunder-struck to learn that the majority had but one common teacher—that they all professed to be interpreters of Christ. . . . And after that one pictures this poor stranger borrowing in desperation the Books of the New Testament and hurrying off to some quiet field or room to see what he could make of words so complex and so obscure as to have led to such confusion ; and finding therein no shadow of complexity, no whisper of doubt or indecision, no difficulty at all—only one admonition, reiterated again and again in infinite variety of beautiful metaphor : “Be natural, be simple as a child, be yourself. Consider the lilies, how they grow.”

The end is not yet ; and Christ, in his wisdom, saw far beyond our day, and took into account all these futile centuries, filled by the blind leading the blind : but, did one forget this, one might well despair, for the latest state of man seems little better than the first.

II

Christ's conception of the Kingdom of God, which came as a startling novelty to most of the ancient world, and which seems to be misunderstood by much of the modern, was based upon the fundamental principles of nature. He was the

founder of that system which, after nineteen hundred years, has been again seriously revived in another sense—the system of carrying the natural laws into the spiritual world. He used logic and common sense where men had never dreamed of using either. Where they had racked their brains for thousands of years in order to invent new and strange personalities and habitations for the Supreme Deity, Christ simply looked about him upon unheeded nature, and saw therein the reflection of the Kingdom; and looked into his soul and saw therein the reflection of the King. He put aside all the methods of his predecessors, all the lovely and unlovely embodiments conceived by men, and took for his model the most commonplace and beautiful of human relationships—the relation between the father and his children. It was at once obvious to him that this must inevitably be the attitude between the Creator and those whom He had created: his reason and his artistic creative instinct would have told him so if he had not already in himself experienced the love of God. He knew that the man and the artist must love that which he has made: he knew to what sublime heights even imperfect human love can climb; and he simply took the whole process of human creation and love and translated them into the terms of the Kingdom of God. If a man's love be so great, as he says again and again, how much greater then must be the love of God? "If then," he asks, "God so clothe the grass, which is to-day

in the field, and to-morrow is cast into the oven ; how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith ?" And yet again : " Fear not, little flock ; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Many more similar sayings are to be found in the Gospels. They are all well known ; and their purport is supposed to have become a truism. Every child is told of the loving paternal God of Christ. The prayer which the most illiterate and debased know by heart begins—" Our Father, which art in Heaven. . . ." And yet, among very large numbers of people, this God of Christ is unknown. Partly, perhaps, by reason of the ill-advised association of the Old Testament with the New, of primitive ideas with the most enlightened vision, the objects which that vision saw so clearly have become clouded and distorted once more. There has returned among men—perhaps it were truer to say, there has always remained in a greater or lesser degree among men—the old Jewish conception of God as an isolated, remote and even angry deity : a judge, rather than a father. He is conceived as sitting apart, awarding impartially praise and punishment ; His Kingdom some remote place, only to be attained by ceaseless striving, by self-torture, by propitiation and sacrifice, never, perhaps, to be attained in this world at all.

It is become, moreover, so firmly established as an article of faith that the conditions of modern life are extraordinarily complex and difficult, that

people see complexities where there are none. The contemptuous meaning frequently attached to the word "simple," is, however, no new thing. It is forgotten that the contemporaries of Christ, although they were so happy as to know nothing of the automobile or of continental philosophy, were in all human aspects just as we are. It is forgotten, or fiercely denied, that in certain respects the human mind has made no appreciable progress since that time. It is forgotten that the sects and "isms" of to-day had their counterpart then. But if these facts could only be appreciated, it would be far more universally understood how every word Christ uttered has its modern application; and if people would only realize that to be what they call "complex" is not necessarily to be interesting, nor to be "simple" necessarily to be ignorant and dull, they would in time revert with a sense of infinite relief from this elaborate world of their invention to the beautiful and simple place Christ knew. He was speaking to the infatuated prophet-hunters of his day when he said "The Kingdom of Heaven cometh not with observation. . . . For the Kingdom of God is within you:" and the whole phrase, no less artistically perfect in expression than true in fact, is addressed to the people of all time.

The Kingdom, as he sees it, is like none of our definite philosophical structures. Or, rather, it is philosophical to the highest degree in the true sense of the word, for it is natural. It is likened unto things which are created and grow by a natural

and understandable process : to a grain of mustard seed, to a leaven hid in a measure of meal, to a field in which a man has sown good seed. And those who would attain to it must be patient, and must not expect the flame in their soul to grow to its full stature in a night. They must not be disappointed and disheartened because prayer in the evening does not produce a miracle the following morning. The mustard seed and the leaven come to their full development within a certain time : and all the arts of man cannot expedite this end, although they may easily delay it. The growth of the human soul is slow : but, just as we cannot say when and how it began, it is useless for us to attempt to determine the period of its fulfilment ; nor, were it in our hands alone, would any fulfilment be possible. Man does not make the mustard seed grow. "With men," as Christ says, "this is impossible ; but with God all things are possible." To quote a modern writer, who absorbed modern knowledge without allowing it to obscure his good sense, who saw that there was no royal road to the Kingdom, no short cut with the help of erudite professors : "We are evidently in the midst of a process . . . so that at least we may be allowed to trust that He who has taken untold ages for the formation of a bit of old red sandstone may not be limited to three-score years and ten for the perfection of a human spirit."

Many people who accept this view despair illogically because they can detect no sign of

progress in themselves. The mustard seed, under favourable conditions, grows steadily and manifestly to the eye ; and they expect to trace an analagous process in their own spirit. But they forget several things. They forget in the first place the point on which Christ, in describing the growth of the spirit, lays so much emphasis : "The Kingdom of Heaven cometh not with observation." And again : "Consider the lilies, *how* they grow ; *they toil not neither do they spin*. . . . Behold the fowls of the air : *for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns* ; yet our Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they ?" And he continues : "Which of you by taking thought can add a cubit to his stature . . . ? Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth. . . . For your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow : for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

In reading these words again, their meaning appears so obvious, the lesson they teach so natural and true, their actual beauty so profound, that to add one's personal comment seems like gilding the lily—an impertinence ; yet it may perhaps be permitted in an age when to live naturally, in any sense of the word, appears to be the last thing that many people think of. These people take an

immense interest in themselves : like the man in a certain story, they do a lot with their souls, one way and another. They expect to be able to watch their spirit grow as they can watch the mustard seed grow. But again they forget. They forget that the lily toils not, neither does it spin : that the mustard seed is unconscious of its growth. It is doing all that is expected of it : it is living its natural life, absorbing nourishment from the earth, drinking in the light of the sun ; but it does not think of this process as growth. If it thinks at all, it thinks of it simply as life. It stretches out a root below and a branch above, just because it feels it ought to do so. And as the mustard seed appears to us, so we appear to God. His Kingdom is in both : in the mustard seed we call it instinct, or what you will ; in man we call it the soul. It is our duty, no less than that of the seed, to obey certain rules and to leave the rest to God. He will see to our growth. And one day, suddenly, and in an hour when we know not, unhastened by all our strivings, undelayed perhaps by all our errors, we shall be aware that the first stage of the universal process is ended ; that the fruits of the seed have crept out of the darkness of the earth into the sunlight ; that the harbour of the Kingdom is within sight and hail.

Christ's selection of the entrants into the Kingdom is marked by his inimitable beauty of method and by a characteristic waywardness—an unexpectedness—which vaguely puzzles some people.

One is taken and another left in what seems to them an inexplicable way. Even when admitting the rectitude of his decisions, they misunderstand his reasons. For in the first place he sets a certain standard before us, a standard no less unattainable in fact than in theory. "Be ye perfect," he says, "as your Father in Heaven is perfect. . . . Judge not, and ye shall not be judged ; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven. . . . For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." Now there has never been a single human being, with the exception of Christ himself, who could look back upon his life and say that he had even approached this standard. It is humanly impossible to approach the perfection of God ; and were this all we might ask with his disciples, "Who then can be saved ?" But this is not all. There is another side. In practice the standard is modified by certain considerations which the disciples had forgotten then as we forget them now.

"With men," Christ had answered them, "this is impossible ; but with God, all things are possible." What they had forgotten, in fact, was that the laws laid down by God were as between man and man, not as between man and Him. What His standard is we cannot say, for it is founded on a knowledge of our hearts which is utterly hidden from us. But we should know that He who can make a mustard seed or a man's soul grow to full stature within a minute if He sees fit, can also dispense, when He sees fit, with the

laws He had made for man. It is thus that we see Him take this man and that, regardless perhaps of manifest demerits in them, and beckon them within the Kingdom. They are taken, where many of their betters are left. And when the latter murmur against God, saying ; "These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day": they receive for answer ; "Take that thine is and go thy way : I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with Mine own . . . ?" And if these last two words—"Mine own"—would only be remembered, the method of selection would cease to be mysterious.

For here again is Christ's conception of the father and his children in another form. The healthy child does not always understand, and sometimes resents, the apparent preference shown by his parents for his afflicted brother or sister ; the father's love for the prodigal appears inexplicable to the son who has never been lost and found again ; but both should remember that "they that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

In this lies the great beauty of Christ's scheme of the Kingdom of Heaven. That Kingdom is not primarily for the good, as people will have it, but for the sinful and unhappy. The righteous and the whole may indeed live always within, but they are but a handful, after all ; and of the

great company who follow tardily, it is to the unhappy that the gates are first opened. It is they who, having nothing, have but to knock and enter : it is they for whom a night porter is always on the watch. For it is they whom God their Father has seen while they were yet a great way off, and upon whom He has had compassion. . . .

In such a case the Laws of Man are as nothing ; a father does not capitulate with his children. The only merits which God demands are faith and understanding, and above all love. We see Christ insisting upon this again and again. To the lawyer he said, " 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it ; 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' On these two commandments hang the Law and all the Prophets." And of the woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee he hath said, "Her sins are forgiven her ; for she loved much."

Such is Christ's idea of the Kingdom of God. In an age when simplicity is unknown, its extreme beauty goes unrecognized. Its very elusiveness, its apparent impalpability, are distasteful to people who have come to regard art as useless, nature as dull, mystery as an abomination, the concrete and the obvious as the only things worth living for. But there will always be found in all countries a few persons to whom its naturalness and its beauty appeal with the force of a great work of art. For this is what it is.

It is eternally true because it is the creation of a great artist ; and it is perhaps only given to people of artistic temperament to understand it. In that state of mind which is popularly associated with the artistic temperament, the irreligious or careless state, the ideas and sayings of Christ are nevertheless recognized as things of beauty ; but the remarkable fact is that when such people, under the agency of some great sorrow, suddenly "come to themselves," and realize for the first time the inner significance of his teaching, the external form appears even more artistically perfect, more exquisitely beautiful, than before. One of these has said, in the early days of his heedlessness : "There was nothing that Christ had said that could not be transferred immediately into the world of art, and there find its complete fulfilment." And later, when through sorrow he had to come to know Christ in another fashion, he said : "Christ . . . is just like a work of art. He does not really teach one anything, but by being brought into his presence one becomes something. And everybody is predestined to his presence. Once in his life each may walk with Christ to Emmaus." And in another place : "Those whom he saved from their sins are saved simply for beautiful moments in their lives."

This, which is profoundly inexplicable to most people, is profoundly true. Christ has been called the apostle of joy, and of hope, and of love ; he is more correctly described as the first and greatest apostle of beauty. His conception of the Kingdom

of God, the most beautiful of all human ideas, is also in its mere form the most beautiful of human works of art. His parables are incomparable. People think that their universal acceptance and triumph is due only to their inner truth. It is not so : the greatest truth, reiterated in men's minds, would become a platitude. We say again and again "we must be good, we must be honest, we must help others" ; and then we go away and act in direct opposition to these convictions. But the parables of Christ can no more become platitudes than the plays of Shakespeare. The stories of the prodigal son and of the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho are as fresh and beautiful to-day as the "Tempest" or the Sonnets. So few people understand that it is not enough to say "Thou shalt not do this and that" : that, being as children, we want examples and not words ; and yet that words, which are nothing, may, in the right hand, become examples. So few understand that if they are troubled or tempted it is better to read Shakespeare or go into a picture gallery than remain alone with their mental platitudes ; and better than either to open the story of Christ at random, and learn again, in his inimitable imagery, that the laws of the spirit transcend the laws of the flesh, and that the Kingdom of God is within them.

III

Wrote St. Paul to the Christians of Corinth :
"Love suffereth long, and is kind ; love envieth

not. . . . Love never faileth ; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail ; whether there be tongues, they shall cease ; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." So runs the Revised Version ; and having gone so far with it we may perhaps conclude the passage as it was read in a thousand churches in England for three hundred years. "And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, these three ; but the greatest of these is Charity."

In these days it seems that Charity is a word fallen out of favour. It is gone from the Bible, swept away with other faults for which no one repines. The revisers had perhaps no choice in the matter ; they could not pick and choose. In such a case the good must go with the bad, for to the precisian all mistakes are bad. Nevertheless, in certain cases, and notably in the conclusion of St. Paul's famous passage, we miss the older interpretation, and could wish it had been possible to respect some of these poor anachronisms. Etymologically charity may be indefensible ; but it is an old and a beautiful word ; and if it be true that it has come to mean to some people no more than the dispensing of coals and blankets and the shaking of the missionary box, it is no less a fact that love, which has superseded it, is a word whose common application is even more narrow. At least, since both spring from a common stock, we may allow ourselves the licence of using now one and now the other, as seems best to us ; for notwithstanding their identity they have come to represent in our minds

different aspects of the great and rare faculty they interpret ; and it is sometimes by a reciprocal use of them that we can best express our ideas.

I wish here to speak of Charity as a function and interpretation of love. It is Charity in its truest sense—the product of love and a wide mind, which forms the keystone of Christ's ideal attitude towards evil and suffering. He saw very clearly, and he tells us frequently, that a man is not benefited by his attitude towards himself, but by his attitude towards others. Evil, as we shall see, he regarded as a definite fact, a disease, an inevitable process of education ; but virtue is a point of view. In other words, a man is not good simply because he is not bad, but because he helps others to be good. "They that turn many to righteousness," said a prophet of old, "shall shine as the stars for ever and ever" ; and we may be sure that he who can only help one other soul will not be denied a place in this constellation. The duty of man is not to isolate himself, not to think of himself as good and of others as bad, never to suppose another's state to be beyond repair ; but to go about freely among all, not to preach or argue, but to eat and drink with them ; treating all alike, and, above all, keeping his eyes open : to move forward, in the splendid words of Lincoln's Second Inaugural : " With malice toward none ; with charity for all ; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in. . . ." And he may be sure that there will come to him opportunities

of helping his fellows. He may have small time to worry about his own soul if he is busy in this way about his Father's business ; but he will not have the need, for each time he uplifts another he uplifts himself also.

The noblest exemplification of this practice is, of course, to be found in the life of Christ himself ; but it does not appear that his markedly individual point of view is at all widely understood. Those who try to imitate his example do so rather blindly, apparently not realizing that his infinite charity was not the outcome of promiscuous benevolence, but was founded on acute understanding no less than on love. He had evidently come to certain definite conclusions about evil, its causes and position as regards humanity. On these conclusions he based his conduct ; and it would be well if they were more generally admitted. For he came to bring sinners to repentance not only because they were sinners, but because he knew that they often held within them greater possibilities than the formally righteous. He knew that a man's nature may be like a fine balance, which the weight of a hair will turn ; and that a man who can sink to a great evil may be capable, in certain circumstances, of rising no less swiftly and far on the side of nobility. He knew, also, that the attainment of grace is often no more praiseworthy than the fall from it is excusable. Holding these views, he regarded evil as in itself a definite means to an end. That end might not be here : but it was none the less certain. And it is this

essential point which people, with a few exceptions, seem unable to grasp. They may condone evil, or they may be lenient towards it, or they may find excuses in certain instances and refrain from any harsh judgment and act : there are a thousand influences at work to modify their views in particular cases ; but in spite of this apparent catholicity of outlook, it will be found in fact that very few, taking the subject as a whole, will acknowledge that sin, in its relation to man's character, may assume the aspect of a necessary and even beautiful thing. They may know of one or two cases which seem to bear this out ; but these they regard as inexplicable dispensations. They talk about the "cleansing fire" ; but they do not mean what they say. They found societies and homes ; but they do so from a sense of duty and not from a sense of belief. They point to confirmed and habitual rascals and to the innumerable cases of failure and ingratitude as evidences of the general hopelessness of reformation ; but they forget that our life neither begins nor ends here, and that in this fraction of it we have not started equally. We do not know what stage this represents in our progress, nor in what relation we stand to the progress of others. There are a few people who take this wider view ; but such is not the general habit of thought. Christ, however, probably thought, and he was probably right, that even in the lives of the worst of us here there passes one swift moment when they might be saved from their follies ; a moment when the equilibrium is

almost exact and when a hair will turn the scale, up or down ; a moment when some outside influence might open their eyes, and when only their isolation stands between them and the understanding of what they may become. It is for this moment that we should keep our eyes and our hearts open. Christ describes it in his own beautiful and incomparable manner when he likens it to "a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore : for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning : lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." For the most of us, this moment "coming suddenly" finds us sleeping ; but perhaps the fault does not always lie so much with the sleepers as with those who are awake, for they are like sentinels upon a city wall, who should watch for others rather than for themselves.

Christ himself possessed in a high degree this faculty of seizing the psychological moment and turning it to account. He was never more beautiful than when he dealt with the woman in the house of Simon, or with that other who was brought to him upon the mount of Olives ; when he wrote upon the sand and shamed the whole world by a single question. He never showed more clearly how far ahead he was of his age (and, one is inclined to add,

of ours) when he confounded all the notions of the orthodox by carrying his conception of the paternal relationship of God down into the depths of evil : when he illustrated in the parables of the prodigal son and the lost sheep the father's welcome to those of his children who have been lost and are found ; and when he told the angry and incredulous Pharisees of the greater joy felt in Heaven over one sinner who repenteth than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance. Here again we find his theory that the Kingdom of Heaven is primarily for those who have suffered. For if sorrow brings wisdom, sin, which brings sorrow, may bring wisdom also ; and Christ, as he shows in the story of Lazarus and the rich man, regarded sin as no more than one of the forms of the inevitable educative process we are undergoing, bearing fruit in the next life if not in this. And so in another place, he speaks of it in the same strain as a disease and of himself as a physician ; and it was as a physician and not as a judge that he dealt with sinners, and that he would have had mankind deal with them. We have indeed strayed widely from this path. We make but poor sentinels, watching for ourselves and for the moment, rather than for others and for the future ; forgetting that in the fall of the city is involved our own destruction. It is essential that Society should be protected ; but it should not forget that it takes up arms against its own members and should strike with discrimination. It should remember that every ruffian whom it lets

loose after a punishment which he has not felt and which has only embittered him, is like an enemy admitted within its walls ; and that every branded, annihilated victim of weakness who in his turn staggers out into the daylight, only to find it more pitiless than the dark place he has left, is like a defender gone forth for ever from the garrison. Certain diseases, as Christ was the first to recognize, require drastic remedies ; but to apply these remedies broadcast and yet insufficiently, as we apply them : to force evil into schedules and ticket it in grades, leaving the worse half of it untouched as we have done : to impose the same iron-bound rules and horrible environment upon thousands of individuals, no two of whom can be alike in character or circumstance, as we have imposed them : to allow to grow up untouched without this arbitrary pale a whole forest of iniquities which waste and stunt and distort national intellect, as we have allowed it ; all this is monstrously unjust and foolish ; and for every one we cure we kill a hundred. We should watch better and punish with more discrimination ; for out of every hundred whom we kill there are many with whom an unobtrusive action, a word, or even a look, would have wrought more effectually than all the laws of Draco.

Perhaps before we can rise to this we must re-learn another lesson from Christ and the sinners whom he came to cure—the lesson of an equitable toleration. People become tolerant of the errors

with which they are familiar ; but their very tolerance is intolerant ; for they condemn loudly those which fall outside of their experience. And so doing they stand condemned by the very people upon whom they instinctively look down. "For if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thanks have ye ? for sinners also do even the same." "There is honour among thieves," as we should say now ; and those who use this phrase so lightly should examine their own standards as closely as they examine the standards of those who have fallen. For the fallen do not condemn their fellow-sufferers : they lie overwhelmed together in an abyss of misery and the understanding which misery brings. "For sinners also love those that love them." It is not for those who have conquered some small temptation, or who are so strong or so dull that the word means nothing to them, to condemn this form of charity. It springs at least from the heart ; and it was one with which Christ had deep sympathy. He had not forgotten the lesson of his own great trial. We read that "he was in all ways tempted as we are" ; but his temptations, as set forth in the allegory of his conflict with Satan upon the mountain, were on a scale commensurate with his powers, and beyond the touch of our imagination. Yet we see how just in form is the comparison, for to him, who had by then crushed all ordinary human desires and imperfections, temptation came, as it so often comes, disguised as pride. And when it left him it may indeed have

been only "for a season"; but his victory had confirmed in him that divine charity, the outward symbol of his love, which was in itself a greater power than any other he possessed: a charity which no contempt could alter, no ingratitude could diminish, no indifference could dull; which could see the small faint spark of beauty shining in the ashes of the sinner's heart and could pardon and intercede for murderers in the very article of their crime; a charity in whose name all that is noblest in mankind has wrought its benefits from his day until ours.

But if Christ felt sympathy for sinners, or at any rate for those who sinned against human laws, he felt none for that great company who are so circum-spect or fortunate as to keep their offences outside man's arbitrary line of punishment, and who are yet always the zealous upholders of the law against sins for which, perhaps, they have themselves neither temptation nor desire. With these calculators, the Pharisees of society, he would not stoop to argue; his sympathy was for those who fell by impulse. Nor had he any patience or concern with those people whom we may describe as negative in character; people of Laodicean temperament, who blew neither hot nor cold, who did the correct thing because it was the correct thing and not because they felt it to be so, who might live and die without committing any overt fault but who had in them no spark of sensibility, whose only opinions were the opinions of others, whose only fear was that

of polite ridicule, whose only courage was that of the crowd. For such Christ felt indifference and contempt. Even the Scribes and Pharisees had convictions and were worthy of his attack ; but these had none, and he passed them by to go among the publicans and sinners.

And so it is we see him, shining in the depths of misery and evil, walking among the wretched and abandoned, his simple words ; “ Thy sins are forgiven ; go, and sin no more,” healing and convincing as no other human words have ever done. Churches and missions, societies and individuals, may carry his name and his work among the sinners of the world ; but he has left a greater monument ; he has established a tribunal in which he sits enthroned, clad not in scarlet but in white ; in which Mercy, with kind eyes, stands for our cold impassive Justice with her scales and bandage ; in which charity is the only advocate, and penitence and love the only plea ; a tribunal, moreover, to which no prisoner is brought but of his own free will ; a tribunal whose home, if we but knew it, is in our hearts.

IV

There are two aspects of Christianity. There is the Christianity which has come to be systematized as a theology ; and there is Christianity as Christ taught it in his own person—as a general mode of life. Essential though the former may be, it is rather apt to obscure the latter ; and the affairs of

this world, about which we know a good deal, are neglected for the study of the affairs of the next, about which we know nothing. The fact that there need be no division has not prevented the implicit acceptance of one. There is a definite line drawn between what are called sacred and profane, or spiritual and secular affairs. Christ drew the line himself, when he said: "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's"; but the point he wished to emphasize was that we should not mistake one for the other. He said nothing about their being regarded as separate and antipathetic ideas. His whole life was a protest against this theory. If he was the greatest apostle of beauty, he was also necessarily the greatest apostle of simplicity—or, to put it in a phrase attuned to modern ears—of common sense. The phrase is a bad one; for the habit of thought which it connotes, and which has nothing to do with commerce or affairs, so far from being common has been in all ages exceedingly rare; but it expresses better than any other Christ's attitude towards society.

We have seen this attitude already displayed in the two main features of his teaching—in his simple and practical conception of the Kingdom of God and in his characteristic view of evil as a potential force for good. We see it again in the matter of what we call religion. For himself, he wished to worship God direct in his own way, with no intermediary or system of theology, no temples or priests.

He would have smiled at speculations concerning justification by faith or the impropriety of lawn sleeves. His only system was that which his own common sense approved. At the same time, however, he strongly deprecated the idea that a similar individuality was suitable for all. He had no erroneous belief in the constancy and wisdom of the multitude. He recognized that they needed a ritual, a doctrine, a discipline, an outward and visible Church. Even when he was mercilessly exposing the Pharisaical spirit, he was adjuring his followers to abide by the simple and more beautiful rules of their Church, and reminding them that the Scribes, low though they had fallen, yet sat in Moses' seat. The cleansed lepers and the blind who had received their sight were told to purify themselves and give thanks before the priest. With anger he drove forth from the Temple those who traded and defrauded within the consecrated precincts. Unreasoning rebellion against authority, simply because it was authority, was the last thing he would tolerate. He was no advocate of chaos. But we see him through all this picking and choosing, discriminating between good and bad, jettisoning on the one hand a whole mass of doctrinal rubbish, retaining and enforcing on the other those simple acts which are alike in every faith, which spring not from theology but from the heart. We see with what discretion he seems to have made use of the ancient Jewish books—a discretion in which it must be remembered he was not followed by the compilers

of the Gospels. Whatever he may have thought as to the origin of these books (and obviously his views were not those of his contemporary compatriots) he will be found to quote only such verses as have a general and non-controversial application, while he continually denounced a strict adherence to the letter of any one of them. "The Sabbath," he said, "was made for man ; not man for the Sabbath" ; and he went on to demonstrate this theory (which is little less revolutionary in our day than it was in his own) in divers instances and with his customary felicity of example.

We see this practical outlook exemplified once more in his attitude to what are called social problems. Here again the plain issue has been confused by the circumstances of his career. He has been hailed as the champion of the oppressed against the oppressors, which he was ; and as the champion of the poor against the rich, which he was not, and which is quite another thing. He was the champion of all classes against themselves ; but he had no concern with social economics, and it is absurd to read into his isolated acts and sayings sentiments which seem to justify chimerical crusades against equally chimerical grievances. It is rightly assumed that he pitied the poor and wretched, but it was because they were wretched and not because they were poor ; and we have yet to learn that he condemned the well-to-do. Zaccheus was a typical example of the small capitalist, and must have been detested by the proletariat of Jericho ; yet Christ

went out of his way to dine with him, and when the publican offered in gratitude to give half his substance to the poor we do not hear that Christ objected to his retaining the other half for himself, although logically it was equally ill-gotten. Neither the goods nor the poor really entered into the question, which was entirely concerned with the soul of Zaccheus. Again, when Christ told another rich man to sell *all* that he had and distribute the proceeds among the needy it was the man's soul and not the needy of which he was thinking. He did not suppose poverty and squalor to be any less fatal to the spirit than extreme wealth. He was no believer in the virtues of discomfort and asceticism, whether voluntary or involuntary. Because he had devoted himself to the suffering, he lived and worked largely among the poor; but we are not to suppose on that account that he liked the slums of Capernaum or Jerusalem, or mistook the voice of their inhabitants for the voice of God. He would have heard any such claim with contempt. He knew too well that the voice of God is not manifest in any class or caste, still less in any irresponsible gathering, but only here and there, rarely, in gifted individuals.

Class distinctions, in fact, meant nothing to him, because he dealt with individuals and wrought for mankind. "My mother and my brethren," he said, "are these which hear the word of God and do it." The whole tone of his language, however, shows that he recognized social inequalities to be inevit-

able in the present state of society. The situation as between master and servant is constantly employed in his parables, where he insists that each class contracts certain obligations towards the other. He was himself utterly impartial; but he was careful not to choose his disciples from the beggar ranks. He saw his people broken and subject to another race; but he scrupulously paid the Roman tribute money. He rose from the table of publicans and sinners to cure the daughter of Jairus, a ruler of the Synagogue at Capernaum and a man of substance. The most individual of men, Christ was in fact by nature conservative. "No man," as he said, "also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new, for he saith, the old is better." The lesson he is continually enforcing is that of the futility and mischief of extremes. He has been disguised as a demagogue and as a Don Quixote; but he was in reality the embodiment of common sense, the most practical man we know. His attitude is summed up in his own phrase: "Leave the dead to bury their dead."

It must be admitted that we are altogether too ingenious in our interpretations of his design, whatever aspect of it we take up. Endless in one respect the task may be, for he touches upon some vital instance near to the heart of each of us, so that we each see him, as it were, from a different angle and in a different light. But this fact should not lead us to forget the essentially simple and finite character of his message; which in its broad facts

appears natural and obvious beyond equivocation, while certainly none has ever been presented with such charm and lucidity of manner. It is well to go back to these broad facts for a season ; to prune, as the author pruned so relentlessly, all unessentials ; to leave our dead to bury their dead ; and, casting off all our ideas of Christianity according to this school or that system, breaking through the cobwebs spun in a thousand other brains, strive to attain to an unimpeded vision of its fundamental sanity and charm.

CHAPTER III

THE BEAUTY OF CHRIST

I

THERE is a story of a certain good man who died, and who, passing in due course up among the birds of the air, and among the winds, and among the constellations, and so through outer space, came at length to the gateway of the Kingdom of God. And there they came and fetched him into the guard-room without the gate, demanding that he should declare what he had brought with him. To which he replied: "Those things which are Cæsar's have I left with Cæsar, but those things which God gave me at the beginning have I brought here to render up to Him again;" and therewith he showed them Faith and Hope and Love, casting these before them so that they fell upon the floor of the guard-room and rolled this way and that, glistening like seeds of quicksilver. But when they asked him if that were all he answered: "Indeed, I have long thought there should be something more, but I cannot remember what it is." Whereupon they sent within,

and fetched and showed him a perfect, flower-like soul, which shone with a brightness far exceeding that of quicksilver : and when he saw it he fell upon his knees and worshipped, crying : " Ah ! now I know ! This, which is even more beautiful than the things I have cherished so carefully all these years, is indeed the true beauty. This is what I have lacked ! " But as he looked upon the floor in sorrow, behold, the seeds of quicksilver, which were Faith and Hope and Love, were run together and become as a wide round mirror, in which the beautiful soul was perfectly reflected. And at this the man's eyes were opened, and he gave thanks. And they said to him : " Be joyful : that which you thought to have lacked you have always possessed. Arise and enter." And the great gates opening silently, he saw within them the Kingdom of God shining like a garden of flowers ; and he entered with joy.

Beauty in these days is a word fallen into desuetude and some disrepute. People conceive of various kinds of beauty. There are still some who think that anything beautiful is necessarily sinful ; others who think it is probably dull. There are more to whom beauty is merely the expression of anything which appeals to their emotions. Others, again, confuse it with mere prettiness, taking tinsel to be gold ; while there is a considerable section to whom the word means simply nothing at all ; and these last, in a utilitarian and ugly age, seem to be increasing rapidly. Even

many noble and artistic people, who have got themselves to the very margin of the truth, contrive, like the good man in the fable, to miss it in this world after all. They go through life enjoying or suffering keenly, acquiring wisdom and helping others; but feeling that with it all something is lacking to complete their happiness or understanding. In their search for the ultimate certainty, the recognition of the true beauty of life, which would set the seal upon their efforts and which they know to be there somewhere, they go the wrong way to work. They only see beauty in fragments and types; they are analytical where they should be synthetical; they take infinite pains to destroy where it were easy to build. The lesson which has been taught many times since Christ taught it, which is perpetuated about them in illimitable variety, is too obvious in its simplicity for them to see. They poke about them, saying, "Lo, here!" and "Lo, there!" They should go out among the fields and hedgerows and consider the lilies, how they grow.

Nevertheless, the true sense of beauty must be somewhere within them; and they should not have to wait for death to pull its hiding-place to pieces before they discover it. For there is only one kind of beauty; and it is to be found in all things of perfect workmanship—in paintings and buildings and flowers no less than in abstract ideas. The beauty of love and truth, of the sea and the constellations in the sky are one and the same. The flower is beautiful as a great painting is beautiful,

because—and only because—it is true, and is the creation of love. Within the limits set about its growth it has done all that is required of it : each of its several parts, its leaves and petals and colouring, lovely in themselves, are lovely because they are designed to play especial parts in the growth of the whole ; the whole, again, is lovely because it has completed step by step its evolution, and has become in itself a perfect thing—which is to say, it is an emblem of truth. This, and the love that fashioned it, and now supplies it with the necessary environment, constitute its final beauty. It is, in fact, a complete work of art. But because it is multiplied by thousands in an acre field, people see its beauty as something quite different from the beauty of the *Hermes* of Praxiteles, which is unique and cannot be duplicated ; forgetting that flower and statue are equally types of perfection, for both are true, and are the work of love. Both have followed the same principles. Their beauty differs not in kind but in degree. But the Craftsman who wrought wonders in the acre field habitually works upon a scale so vast in conception and minute in detail that wonder overcomes the understanding ; and it is forgotten that as He made us, His principles of beauty are reflected, however imperfectly, in ours ; and that those principles are immutable and simple. A thing of beauty is always a thing of perfect workmanship within its natural limits, be it a human life, or an idea, or a flower.

If the meaning and simplicity of beauty could

only be more generally recognized, a number of human puzzles would instantly be resolved ; among them perhaps that of the personality of Christ. All of us who conjure up mental images cannot fail to have been struck, in reviewing for the first time our mental image of the Bible, by the violent and apparently inexplicable contrast between the Books of the Old Testament and those of the New. Although it is true that the law of continuity is in many respects observed by the two series—that historically, ethically, and temperamentally the New Testament is in a sense the natural corollary of the Old, yet, at the same time, there is felt to lie between them a chasm so profound as to render their conjunction illogical. Despite the apparent points of contact, they stand as irrevocably severed as black from white. It is not only that the two represent different doctrinal systems ; that the one is Oriental in tone and the other Occidental ; that the one is Jewish and national in application, while the other is Christian and universal ; it is something beyond the interpretation of creeds, something too obscure or obvious for narrow eyes to discern. It is something in the texture and atmosphere of the two series of books : and the cause of difference lies so completely in the New Testament that the chasm divides it not only from the Jewish but from all other sacred books, and from all other works of men.

People are apt to think that in realizing this contrast to hang upon the personality of Christ

himself they have discovered its whole meaning. But many are finding now that it is not enough to generalize in such a case, and that vagueness engenders doubt. Either there is some definite and comprehensible attribute in Christ which is responsible for this gulf of separation, or else the fact must be that the story of his life is a fairy-tale, lovely but unsubstantial. From that this gulf exists is undeniable ; and it is becoming widely recognized that it no longer suffices to debit its origin to some miraculous faculty within him ; in other words, to fall back upon authority and revelation like children, and say it is because he is a God. Those who find this explanation sufficient are perhaps fortunate ; but those of us who wish to think of Christ as a man must look for our solution of the problem elsewhere.

It is probable that all thinking people invent for themselves some hypothesis which they hope will bridge the gulf ; and there can be no doubt at all that not a few of them find their bridges impracticable. At the back of all their explanations there is felt to lie some impalpable, fugitive thing which might complete the structure ; failing which, however, the rest are worthless. They cannot believe Christ to be a God, and they cannot see him as a man. The Gospels come to appear to them as a charming but capricious and unscientific allegory, standing alone and inexplicable, and therefore vaguely irritating ; and where the law of continuity has carried them so far they cannot do with the

inexplicable. And so it is that we see them breaking away from their old beliefs and running hot-foot from this religious system to that, inquiring of bishops and elders, popes and philosophers, even as their predecessors ran to and fro among the despised polytheisms of the ancient world. We see them enduring tremendous conflicts within themselves and perpetuating their spiritual vacillations in prose and verse, for the astonishment, and, it is to be hoped, the pity of a possibly more reasonable and serene posterity. We see some of them satisfying themselves at length that they have found in this or that system the opening they had sought; but we see others living on in perplexity and perhaps in sadness, until, losing heart, they give up the struggle and sink into apathy. They had stood long before the blind and bridgeless gulf which they imagined to separate them from the truth they were so anxious to understand; but their incomplete hypotheses proved to be no Charon who, for an obolus, would ferry them across its seven streams.

There may, however, be more people than there would seem to be to whom the problem of the gulf is no problem at all. There may be nothing in the rise of indifference and unbelief against which the Churches, one and all, cry out: nothing in the revived passion for strange exotic creeds. There may be no connexion between these things and that modern analytical spirit which shirks with disgust the simple explanations of simple facts,

which has destroyed romance, and which is responsible for the manifest and rapid decay of the imaginative faculty. But on the other hand there may be a very distinct and vital connexion. The atmosphere of the New Testament, whether we look upon it as a system of teaching, as a biography or as a piece of literature, is the atmosphere of the highest art; and there can be little wonder, overlaid as it is with the artificial incrustations of dogma, that it puzzles an inartistic age. The blind faith of the Middle Ages, when romance was flourishing and the imagination was a power, probably got nearer to an understanding of Christ than we can arrive at with all our exegetical exercises: certainly St. Francis of Assisi and some of his fellows had the true vision. There probably are more people now than there have ever been who utterly misunderstand the purport of Christ's teaching because of its very simplicity; and who for the same reason cannot cross the gulf between the atmosphere of the gospels and that of their own scheme of things.

If they only considered in Christ the growth of the flower they should find the answer to all their questionings: they should find the unreality of his life to be only apparent. Because he appears incomparable by the ordinary standards of men, it does not follow that there is nothing else, apart from a god, to which he can be compared. Men are as yet far from perfect as a whole, and their standard is consequently not high; but if they were the only animate things upon the earth, it

would still be rash to conclude that the perfect man is an impossibility. But they are not the only animate things : there lies about them a whole world of organisms, which appear to be already perfected within their limits ; which are, at any rate, infinitely more ancient and more highly perfected than man. Animals and plants had advanced far along the path of evolution before man was in existence. A flower, as a complete work of art, a type of truth and beauty, will put to shame any human being. But if a perfected flower had appeared among its fellows while the latter were mere green embryos, it would have seemed an anachronism ; and in after years its very existence would come to be denied. So it is with Christ : by some strange ordinance he has appeared, the only virtually perfect man, long before his time ; and since his death he has passed through the inevitable stages of fame as a god, as an impostor, and as a myth.

In this aspect the gulf between the gospels and the rest of human knowledge can be understood. The contrast is constituted of the beauty of Christ—the beauty of perfection seen for the first (and hitherto the only) time in a human being. It is a natural perfection, rendered apparently unnatural or supernatural by its premature appearance. His beauty is not the beauty we know in mankind nor the beauty known in the embryo flower ; it is the beauty of completion—of the lily, of the sea and of the stars—the beauty of perfected nature, in-

carnate of love and truth. There is little wonder that such an influence has stamped the books which tell of it with an air of unreality sadly disturbing to the materialists. But if there be anything in evolution ; if the laws which have been followed scrupulously by animals and flowers and, hitherto, by man, are to be carried in the latter to their logical conclusion ; there will come a time in the far future when this unreality will seem unreal no longer ; when the natural humanity of Christ will be universally acknowledged ; when his lessons will one and all be learnt ; and when his work will be done. For the present perhaps only artists and saints can understand him ; and although all artists are far from being saints, all true saints have been artists.

II

It is for the foregoing reasons that the New Testament remains, take it all in all, the most wonderful book in the world. It is wonderful not only for its thought, its knowledge, its morality and its love, it is wonderful also in a sense few people nowadays think it seemly to consider even in such a connexion—as a work of art. The others may rest assured that the artists of the Middle Ages, who painted Madonnas and built cathedrals, would have held no such scruples. It is in its way the greatest human work of art we know, or are likely to know for a long time to come ; in its way more wonder-

ful than the works of Shakespeare or of Voltaire, of Michael Angelo or of Praxiteles. For it is written by many people; it is manifestly incomplete and scrappy; it is, in short, a singular medley, containing of Christ's actual sayings no more than a handful, together with a few epistles, a narrative of travel and an astonishing imaginative poem. It is of course the supreme unconscious art of Christ himself that gives this collection its great significance; but his beauty has entered into each of these many writers, most of whom never even saw him, and so transformed them that they became capable of great things. It is his beauty that charges the simple narrative form of the three synoptic gospels, that has inspired St. John to write one of the most amazing pieces of imagery in any language, that has elevated the simple pastoral letters of St. Paul to the position of works of great artistic merit. The writers were apparently just such a little company of ordinary men as may be met with anywhere in a Sabbath day's journey; and yet, filled with the beauty of their master they set to work, one here, one there, one in prison, another on a remote island, and wrote down for our admiration their anecdotes and messages and dreams. The effortless results were so perfect that, flung together without order, lacking certain items among them which are now, it is to be feared, lost for ever, mistranslated and misconstrued, they nevertheless constitute as nearly a perfect whole as any work of man's hands can ever hope to be. It is within the region of

possibility that certain of the contributions may come to be recognized as corrupt in parts, and therefore altered or displaced, and one likes to think it no less possible that additions to their meagre total may yet be found ; but in neither case can their sum of beauty be materially diminished or enhanced. They are beautiful not in quantity but in quality ; not in degree but in kind ; because they are filled with the spirit of the beauty of Christ.

Christ possessed, in fact, the highest type of creative genius ; he not only created beautiful things himself, but he also inspired other and quite ordinary people to create them. This has been said, in almost the same words, by one who suffered greatly, and who, by suffering, came to realize the true beauty of Christ, and he goes on to say, "Christ's place is indeed with the poets. His whole conception of humanity sprang right out of the imagination, and can only be realized by it." And this explains why so few people are able to understand the true, the universal, the incarnate beauty of Christ. Doubtless the imagination, in certain natures, requires careful supervision and training, or it will go disastrously astray ; but this is so of all great gifts ; and of all the gifts of God imagination is the greatest. It is the sum of all the others, and it alone deals directly with the human soul. The mind has become little better than the servant of matter, and as such can and should be employed about material affairs ; but it is of the true imagination—the human aspect of the soul—

that Christ spoke when he asked how it could profit a man to gain the whole world and yet lose this. The capacity for business and affairs, of which we make so much, is no more than a glorified form of cunning ; but great generals and statesmen, great painters and musicians, equally with those great men who ply no obvious trade but whom we know to be great in themselves—all these are great by reason of their imagination. Where Christ says “Blessed are ye that hunger now, for ye shall be filled. . . . But woe unto ye that are full, for ye shall hunger” ; he is not talking of pounds and pence, nor of loaves and fishes, but of the great gulf between those who, having imagination, see what they may possess and hunger for it, and those others, without the greatest gift, who think that they have all and talk much about it, but whose lives are like a drum, sounding and empty. The greater our gift of imagination, the poorer we see ourselves to be ; and here again Christ understood. “Blessed,” he said, “are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” And again : “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

How thoroughly he understood, and how thoroughly has he been misunderstood in turn ! Where he used the words meek and poor, our blind guides have imposed their own literal and material interpretation. These fools and blind conceive that he meant them to go about the world cringing and in rags, beating their breasts and

clamouring for all to witness their humility. Many of us must find these people exasperating beyond words ; but we can reflect how thoroughly they are lashed for all time by the contempt of Christ. "Ye serpents, ye generations of vipers . . . !" He cries at them, and again and again, "Hypocrites, hypocrites. . . . !" And yet how patiently and with what clearness he tries to make them understand the difference between the meek in mind and the meek in spirit, between the coward and hypocrite and the man who has imagination and is not afraid to follow where it leads. For Christ, when necessary, speaks plainly and without parables ; and of all his sayings, not one, to those who have ears, is more exact, or more profound, or more strictly applicable to their own feelings than that one we have already quoted, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." The imaginative know how startlingly apt this is. For they can be meek in spirit, and they have indeed inherited the earth. They possess it now, and always. For the secret of imagination, although it seems to involve a paradox, is absurdly simple. Where the crowd suppose the imaginative man to be dreaming, he is really living ; and where they think they live they only dream. They are grasping at shadows ; but he has already inherited the earth and all its beauty. For imagination is no more than the capacity for seeing inside things, for knowing why the world is so beautiful, for seeing how and why the lilies grow. Life is not an affair of

stocks and shares, of marrying and giving in marriage, of wars and charities and the hitting of a little ball about a field : life is in the sky and sea and wind, and in our soul. And the pity of it is that all of us begin with the knowledge of this life ; for it is in every little child. We elders stand afar off, and sometimes marvel and sometimes take no notice at all, but the child's soul, so recently plucked from the elemental forces, is yet near to them, and still *remembers*. There will always, however, be a few happy people who do not know how to grow old ; who are always children in spirit ; of whom it has been said, "Those whom the Gods love die young." And of such indeed is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Of course this is not to say we should despise or even avoid the things of this world. We should render unto Cæsar, and take pleasure in doing so. We are not yet educated up to anything higher. All we have to do is to remember the subordinate position of these affairs, and yet to bear in mind at all times the fact that the things which are Cæsar's and the higher life may and should work harmoniously together. So many people seem to think that this is impossible. Do they suppose that Christ wished every fisherman to cast away his nets, every publican to desert his cash-box, every doctor to leave his patients to die ? Such would be the logical conclusion of the arguments of those who say that either the world's pleasures or the world's work or both, are necessarily sinful. Christ said nothing so absurd. Is he not always telling us to be as

children or as flowers ? And do not children and flowers take their pleasures as they come ? What Christ did was to pick out here and there, with the intuition of genius (although even he was fallible ; else how came Iscariot among them ?) certain men who were possessed of gifts greater than they knew—faith, and love, and personality ; and then to stimulate their imaginations with his own inimitable charm, so that for the first time they saw of what they were capable. And then he sent them forth about the land to preach to their working fellows this great lesson among others : that although the laws of the spirit transcend the laws of the flesh, the lower laws must be observed no less than the higher, while both may work together, side by side, so that the one helps the other.

In that splendid story of the centurion in St. Luke we have a case of one set of these laws being adapted to the other. This man was probably in much the same position as that of one of our young subalterns commanding a remote station in India ; that is to say, that in addition to his endless military duties and the care of his centuria of men, he had to handle all the multifarious businesses that come in the way of an official of the governing race. He was a good and conscientious servant of Rome ; but, what was more, he had heard of Christ and believed in him, and his imagination was alive. Troubled over his dependent, and wishing for that help he had heard of Christ giving to others, he suddenly saw in his own life, low down in the scale

of authority, the worldly image of the life of our Lord, a life far more free, because far higher in the scale, and possessed of its own all but illimitable quota of authority ; but a life still under the infinite authority of God. He saw instantly, through this comparison, how it must suffice for Christ to say to pain and sorrow "Go !" and they would depart. "For I also," he explains simply, "am a man set under authority. . . ."

This story is one of the most dramatic and affecting of all the beautiful idylls in the Gospels. It should fill us with delight every time we read it. If even Christ, who read men's minds and hearts as we read the printed page, " marvelled at him " when he heard these things, we have far more cause for wonder : not only at this perfect example of faith, but at the glimpse it gives us of the charm of Christ himself. For this indeed was the true faith : not that blindest faith which " may haply save," nor yet the cold faith of reason ; but the faith of such sympathy and insight as can only be built on imaginative love. For although imagination is the greatest gift we can receive, it requires one of the other gifts from which itself is sprung to direct it along the noblest channels. Love, like faith, is a blind creature without imagination ; but on the other hand, the noblest form of imagination is glad to become the handmaid of love. It is the artist's love for his craft that uplifts his imaginative powers above the ordinary ruck of dreams ; it is a man's love for his friend that fashions out of his imagina-

tion the gift of alert understanding. And it is Christ's intense love and sympathy for all mankind that inflames his imaginative soul until it glows out in that supreme personal charm which drew the most diverse natures so magically towards him, and which elevated widely differing intellects into sympathy with his own. So it had been with the Roman officer. Christ himself was probably utterly unconscious of his great fascination; and it is splendid to see his surprise and delight at the centurion's words—to see how, when he "heard these things, he marvelled at him." How that man must have treasured the memory of his expression and his smile. Christ was not often to be so happily surprised. The best imagination, the servant of love, the giver of understanding, he probably found as rare in the world then as it is to-day.

For even while he praises the faith of the Roman, he compares it sadly with the unbelief of those of whom he regarded as peculiarly his own people. The sorrow of Christ came not in his death, but in his life. There is something infinitely pathetic in this beautiful, joyous spirit devoting itself to the succour of strangers, because its own people denied it; and in the delight it finds in those rare moments when it meets another spirit that understands its own beauty.

III

There has come down to us so far not one authoritative line or word descriptive of Christ as

he was when he came to preach in his own country. All that we can profess to know of his outer personality has to be deduced from very inadequate—to most people, doubtless, altogether inadequate sources ; no more than the general tone of his known career and sayings and their effect upon our minds, together with the apparent attitude of the Gospel writers towards him. Even for such a tissue of moonshine as this it is only safe, perhaps, to inquire of the three synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke ; for about the Gospel according to St. John there hangs more than an element of doubt.

We find, then, in these earlier narratives virtually no mention, in so many words, of Christ's appearance, habits, or temperament. We only read here and there that he was grieved, or that he rejoiced, or that he was angry. This unfortunate absence of intimate detail is not improbably involved in the whole question as to when the Gospels were written ; but in itself this is not one of great importance, and there is happily no occasion for us to touch upon it here. And even had the Gospels been written contemporaneously with the events they describe, instead of being put together some years later, as is supposed, from memorized collections of Christ's sayings and deeds, in all likelihood they would have suffered from a similar vagueness of outline and lack of detail. It is seldom given to amateur annalists of contemporary events to remember that they are writing for a posterity wholly ignorant of matters which to them seem too

familiar or elementary to record ; and in this case the disciples, thinking their own little world far wider and more interested than at the time it was, and lifted out of their ordinary habits of mind by love and enthusiasm and the influence of a master who never thought of himself, nor of how he acted or spoke, would catch his own lofty and impersonal view, and never think of perpetuating the unessentials. And probably, after all, this is as well ; else they might not so completely have succeeded in making us understand the true beauty of Christ, that impalpable atmosphere of beauty amid which he moved and which so irresistibly infected people ; which, in fact, drew themselves to him and was working through them even as they wrote. But we would give much for the fragment of a journal by some curious and sympathetic outsider, some Greek or Roman official busy taking notes in his spare time, some Samuel Pepys from the dockyards of Tyre or Cæsarea. A few lines describing Christ in his lifetime from such an observer would be valuable for a weightier reason than our personal pleasure. Christ's remembered sayings dealt (naturally enough) hardly at all with what we should call the cheerful side of life, but rather with those sins of omission and commission which he came to charm away ; and on top of this inadequate and one-sided picture there come with startling contrast the scenes of his condemnation and death described with every circumstance of verisimilitude. On account of this want of historical balance in the story the

Christian Churches have been led into the error of the fable of the Man of Sorrows. Most of us, I suppose, have accepted this phase for long without question ; just as from Pole to Pole, from one hemisphere to the other, wherever the smallest church stands or a missionary has penetrated, millions of people have accepted the alleged portrait of Christ, hanging upon the cross, as typical of his appearance throughout his ministry. The accumulated weight of centuries of dogma, of suggestion and of habit of thought, have driven this false conception so hard and far into the human mind that one may well doubt if it will ever be removed.

But the conception is an artificial one, evolved far back in the early Middle Ages, to forward a particular and praiseworthy end. That end is now long since accomplished ; the human mind has meantime advanced ; the human temper has softened ; the human ideal is a nobler and a saner one ; yet, however vastly elaborated and refined, the conception of the tortured man of sorrows is with us still. The fundamental note of the Churches' general teaching is Christ's death and not his life. That in which alone he could not outwardly excel us all is held up constantly for our observation, at the inevitable expense of that in which he stood supreme. That in a sense he died for us all is as incontrovertible as that his death was tragic and noble : but he would have been the last himself to wish us to exaggerate the meaning of his sacrifice. In given circumstances the meanest

among us can find it in himself to die finely. The brainless pugilist who died among the sword-blades at Badajoz ; the perjured king who died outside Whitehall ; the very thief who passed into Paradise with Christ ; did not all these die finely, as finely, to the dispassionate savage or materialist, as Christ himself ? But what are their lives, or the lives of all the noblest of their fellow-men, when put into the scale with his ? He came not to teach men to die well or to think of their deaths ; but to live well and to think of the lives of others. He wished them to learn from his life, not from his death ; and yet there can be little doubt that, by the act of his own Church, he has been made the innocent agent of the perpetuation among men of that latent dread of death which we all feel at times, and of which we should all be heartily ashamed.

It should be remembered that the early Christians who had met him face to face, and their immediate descendants who remembered and treasured the stories of how he looked and spake and smiled, had no such gloomy and perverted notion of his life and death. They studied sedulously the former ; and by the latter they did not dream that they had gained anything, but rather thought of what their Master had gained thereby and of what they had lost. To them he was no man of sorrows, with the sad and stricken face we have come to know so well, no shadowy mystic walking in a gathering environment of gloom ; but a strong and cheerful friend, a radiant and magnetic personality, a real man busy

about the affairs of his Father and theirs. And it is so that we should try to see him ourselves.

We should think of him as a man of great genius, of a genius far greater than that of any other man we have known or are likely to know ; but bearing the unmistakable insignia of his race. For men of genius are a race apart, and are in essentials almost invariably of no particular country, but are what we may call extra-national. They have received the greatest gifts of God ; and their universal country is the kingdom within them. And just as Nelson and Shakespeare, let us say, were Englishmen in no sense except that of patriotism, so Christ, except in his love for the people of Israel, was in no sense one of them. Perhaps the most remarkable of the gifts of genius is this sort of silent flame of patriotism, so different, although exactly how we cannot say, from the sentiment of the ordinary obvious man who also does his duty by his country ; and Christ was the most perfect man of genius not so much by reason of his supreme powers of mind and spirit, but because, over and beyond his love for his people, he loved, even more profoundly, all mankind. We can be sure he would have wished to spend his life among his own kin, trying, however fruitlessly, to win them back into a simpler and nobler faith ; but he must soon have realized how small were his ultimate prospects of success ; while beside and far beyond this congenial task there opened out another vista of opportunities far more proportionate to his powers, and in which, as he

must at times have hoped, the possibilities were infinite. He saw the Græco-Roman world, after reposing comfortably for centuries upon its pantheistic creeds, suddenly become disturbed by religious doubts : in the words of Matthew Arnold : " On that hard pagan world disgust and secret loathing fell ; " and everywhere men of inquisitive and agile minds, far more receptive material than the ignorant and bigoted Jews, were searching about for something that would satisfy their awakened intelligences. Christ loved them all too well to adhere to his favoured plan ; he relinquished sadly all hope of moving the mass of his unbelieving countrymen ; and passed on to accomplish this greater task instead. Looked at rightly, this was unselfishness in the highest degree. It is in this sense that Christ's true people is the human race ; his patriotism was universal, and therefore the greatest patriotism of all. To such a passion of disinterested love, no other man, it seems, in spite of all our talk of " universal brotherhood," can ever yet hope to attain ; and this alone would make him supremely beautiful.

But the less important characteristics of genius, although in him refined to the highest degree, are no less manifest. His love and understanding of beautiful things, his sense of humour and his intuitive insight into men and matters ; his flashes of splendid scorn and anger, and his passion for children and the child-life ; his unshakeable optimism that bore up through all discouragement,

and above all his waywardness—the incarnation in himself of that wind which, under God's care, bloweth where it listeth : in all these is he akin to the noblest forms of genius as we know it. He was not only the greatest of men ; he must also necessarily have been the most beautiful and charming of men. He must have charmed people by the gesture of his hand, the inclination of his head, or the mere ghostly touch of his shadow ; and I am sure children and animals ran instinctively to him when he smiled upon them, as he must often have done. Yet this is the man they would have us believe went through life with the shadow of impending tragedy always on his face. Would children and animals have run to such a stranger ? Would a man who spoke and thought only in terms of beautiful things—of flowers and the winds and children, and whose life was devoted to helping others, have worn always so sad a face ? What should we think of a doctor who was so affected by his patient's sufferings that he came to tell him he would not die with a long face and tears of grief ? Sorrows Christ knew, of course ; and such sorrows as we can never truly fathom ; but was he the man to let every stranger know of them, or to allow them to assume control over himself ? And when, finally, we recollect that Christ's four years of teaching in one little country have practically determined the course of European history for nineteen hundred years, we are entitled to believe him to have been a man very different from the

vague and dreamy—I had almost said ineffectual—figure with which we have been familiarized by so many generations of scribes and painters. I think we should rather see him as a strong man with the infinite gentleness of a woman; a man habitually and by conviction cheerful, and with a smile that made the halt and maimed forget for the moment all their ills; quiet in his ways, but not too quiet; apt to talk quickly and vivaciously, and as we know he alone could talk, when moved or interested, but moved often to go somewhere away from people, as up into a mountain, to be alone with his thoughts; or, if that were impossible, walking with a quick and purposeful step, but no less absorbed, through the narrow, winding, blistered streets of those Syrian towns, or along the broad and shadowless highway. We see in him an infinite patience, ruffled sometimes into flashes of irritation or contempt by the selfishness—though never by the ignorance—of others; and an infinitely merciful and enduring spirit, sometimes excited to splendid bursts of anger, as in that delightful scene where he makes himself a small scourge of cords and drives the money-changers and the sellers of sheep and doves helter-skelter before him from the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple. And we see in him, as I have said before, an invincible optimism, the optimism of one who knew God and knew how much love He offered, and whose own spirit was at perfect peace; an optimism without which

his career would have been impossible ; which enabled him to carry it through notwithstanding the unbelief and hatred of his own people and the weakness and treachery of his chosen companions. For the last word I had almost put friends ; but a friend, in a sense that David and Jonathan understood the word, Christ does not seem to have found in his later life ; unless we accept the rather apocryphal instance of St. John. Probably he felt that his life should be filled with his Father's work, and deliberately denied himself the first and last and rarest of all luxuries.

We may be sure also that he had a great love of beautiful things ; and that no one has enjoyed so much as he the sea and sky, the flowers and forests, the fierce animal beating of the wind on a stormy day, and the great ragged clouds driving up over the curve of the world across the blue above. He must have had the true love of the great artist for all these things ; and also the keener and more intimate delight that must be felt by one beautiful thing in another. But he was far from despising the things of the world, as his followers so frequently forget ; he simply had no time for them, and did not particularly care for them himself. For where he thought he could help mankind, he could be all things to all men ; he could dine with the honourable and rich, no less than with the publican and sinner. To all alike he would be invariably courteous and gentle and inspiring. And we see in him through all the

perfect flower-like, child-like mind and soul which made him so beloved by children ; and we may be sure, whenever he was able, he liked to detach himself for a time from the petty troubles and greater sorrows of his life, and step aside to play and laugh with children by the way.

The greater sorrows he met, as I suppose we all meet them, humanly speaking, alone. When he was tempted, as we are tempted, by Satan, he was alone : and he was alone again, for his companions slept, when his great agony of soul came upon him in the garden of Gethsemane, shaking even his habitual hopefulness : the agony of knowing that he had been betrayed and of believing that he had failed in his task. Nevertheless, deserted as he was by man, his spirit, as he knew, was no less befriended there by God than it had been upon the mountains where he loved to climb alone to pray.

IV

The subject of Christ and his Gospel, like all other great and complete ideas, involves a paradox. From one point of view it is simple, but from another extremely complex. Looking back from our modern standpoint down the perspective of history, the man and his task are merged together in the perfected image of the whole. We can no more imagine Christ without the Gospel as we know it and have known it for so many centuries, than we can imagine the Gospel without Christ as the central

figure. The Gospel explains the beauty of Christ, and Christ is the beauty of the Gospel.

Of course, upon reflection, this must seem very obvious to us all now ; so obvious that we do not give sufficient thought to the relation of cause and effect. For it has not always been so. There was a time when these relations appear far more complex ; a time when Christ's "beautiful adventure" was incomplete ; a time when his Gospel had no such exact definition or permanent form as that with which we are so familiar : when, in effect, the written Gospel did not exist at all, and only Christ himself, his beauty and charm, stood where these writings stand permanently now, between a weary and sceptical world and the attractions of an effortless unbelief. The generation which had known him was probably dead before his sayings were even written down in any form approximating to completeness ; and it must have been long after this event before these collections were distributed at all widely among those who were already his followers and those others who wished to be. How great must that beauty and charm have been that could bridge the miles, the years and the grave, and carry on alone the great adventure ! For by the time of the first distribution of the written Gospels the adventure was already an adventure no longer : the beautiful spirit of Christ had wrought through those who loved him, and had builded better than in his time on earth he could have hoped ; and the foundations of his house were already laid upon the rock.

The more one considers this early impulse behind the Christian Church the more remarkable it appears. For the greater part of Christ's teaching was in itself no new thing. By a recondite process of reasoning similar to that which has led people to see in Christ's death a phenomenon of more import to them than his life, they have got into their minds a vague idea that justice and morality and all noble things began with his teaching. Of course this is ridiculous. There had been Christians before Christ ; and the beauty of love and truth was no more a stranger then to the best among mankind than it is now. The Ten Commandments, under various disguises, were honoured more or less completely from China to Peru long before the days of Moses. And in Christ's time even the idea of a loving and truly paternal God was not sufficiently novel or in itself attractive to have drawn many permanent adherents. Abstract ideas, however lofty, have little real influence upon the great majority who are busy about their own affairs ; and even those few who trouble to think at all about these things acquiesce rather with their minds than with their souls. They mentally accept truth and love and honour as necessarily and demonstrably beautiful things ; but they never seriously proceed to inquire into the cause. They do not now, any more than did they then, remember Christ's advice to consider the lilies. They employ their reason, instead of their imagination ; which perhaps explains why true imagination, among certain peoples,

threatens to become as obsolete as the pineal eye. And so, in the days of Christ, the world was quite prepared to believe intellectually in some new god, who might be discarded in time as the old ones had been.

It is not likely that many of them understood this new god, any more than many of us understand him now. For it seems very doubtful if we have really advanced at all in all this interval of years. We still worship God intellectually. We quite agree with Voltaire that if there had not been a God it would have been necessary to invent one. We feel that this and that and the other, point logically and conclusively to the fact that there must be a God somewhere. There is one difference, and one only, between us and those people who changed their gods almost daily according to their temporary geographical surroundings, their disappointments, or their hopes. We have not changed ours. And when we ask ourselves, as we really know God no more intimately than did the people we so contemptuously describe as heathens, why we have adhered to Him, there is only one answer. It is because he is Christ's God. It is all but impossible to love Christ merely with the intellect; and since we love him with our souls, we are prepared to take his word for God. And herein lies the abiding wonder of Christ.

It is to be hoped that those of us who realize how vicariously we accept and worship God have the grace to be ashamed of themselves, and desire to

understand Him as Christ understood Him. If all our talk of human progress be worth anything, and be not confined in substance to the invention of steam-engines or the phonograph, we have little excuse for our ignorance. But in the days of the more obvious forms of religious superstition, the days of the worship of Diana and Æsculapius, and of fat and imbecile Emperors of Rome, it should have been far more difficult to attain to the understanding of this new God of Christ. It was not an age of simplicity. Nevertheless—and herein is the abiding wonder more wonderful still—these benighted heathen peoples, with none of our advantages of knowledge, of hereditary influence, of books, of long descending series of that beloved thing precedent ; without a vestige of that religious basis with which now every infant starts unconsciously equipped : these peoples began at once to accept God on Christ's word alone. Nor was this all. At a word from Christ they overthrew all their laborious edifice of belief, cleared out their pantheon of all its gods, and, in this empty fane, began to worship as he told them without rite or mummery, the new God whom he interpreted to them. So great was Christ's beauty and charm that they argued : " If this wonderful man says these things, they must be so. He obviously understands more than we can understand : he sees farther than we can see ; and he is the most perfectly beautiful being we have ever imagined. Therefore we cannot but follow him. . . ." They recognized, in an

instantaneous flash of wisdom, that he spoke as one having authority over them, and not as their lifeless mechanical scribes or priests. Of course, I am here speaking of the mass ; for a few great spirits here and there, when Christ had opened their eyes, saw God even as he saw him. But for the mass, they rested securely on the word of Christ. They did not even call themselves the worshippers of the new God, as they had called themselves worshippers of the Jupiters or of the Cæsars : they simply styled themselves Christians, or the followers of Christ. And as such he regarded them, and loved them the more for their simple trust. They are his sheep, as he tells them again and again, and he is their shepherd. They never dreamt then of worshipping either him or his parents. Why should they ? He was simply their Lord, the greatest man they had ever seen, a Son of God in the truest and noblest sense. Nor did it even so much as enter his mind that they should worship him. He would have been horrified and disgusted with the bare idea ; as horrified as were Paul and Barnabas with the people of Lystra. "Why callest thou me good ?" he asks the rich man : "There is none good but One, that is God. . . ." Only in the so-called Gospel of St. John, a doubtful and late production utterly alien in tone to the Synoptic Gospels, is there any hint of such a claim by him, and the most cursory examination of that Gospel convinces one of the worthlessness of certain parts of it. Christ, in fact,

may be called the first Unitarian ; and what he was, that the earliest Christians, in the simplicity of their hearts, tried also to be. It seems that we know better now.

Christ has been called "a lover for whose love the whole world was too small" ; nevertheless, alone of the great teachers, he failed to make his own people love him. "Verily," he said bitterly unto them, "a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country." But if we examine the causes of this failure, it proves to be bound up with the explanation of his great triumph over the pagan world. For the Jews, by their altered national training since the Captivity, by their exclusiveness, their self-satisfaction and hatred of the Gentile and all his works, and by their harsh and increasingly oppressive creed, stood by this time almost alone among nations of antiquity in their ignorance and scorn of beauty. That sense of beauty, sometimes gentle, sometimes passionate and barbaric, which threads its way like a river among the bald facts and anachronisms of the Old Testament, had been almost completely lost. Some of the most beautiful legends in the sacred books had been reduced to mere ugly absurdities by the exegetical methods of the Scribes ; and the poor fruit of their vast labours, as collected in the Talmud, presents a lamentable contrast beside the Song of Solomon or the Psalms. To such a depth had the orthodox educated classes fallen ; and the proletariat were become a fanatical, conceited and ignorant mob, occupied with their

ephemeral grievances, their daily work, and such of the endless elaborations of doctrinal law as they were competent to understand. But beauty in any form, which the Jews had come to dislike because they could not comprehend it, was part of the daily life of nearly all the pagan peoples, saturated by this time with Greek and Oriental ideas, inquisitive, cultivated, artistic, and brought up amid the most beautiful and profound works of the greatest artistic age the world has yet known. For some time past, seriously disturbed in their religious beliefs, realizing that Apollo and Zeus were but unsatisfactory gods, they had reluctantly abandoned for philosophy all those beautiful myths which had inspired their noblest works of art. They discovered in Christ and his Gospel the very things for which they had been looking, but which they could hardly have hoped to find in conjunction : a theory of religion which brought rest to their "startled souls," presented in a form so beautiful that it completely satisfied their artistic sense. They saw in Christ a great artist, and they were therefore prepared to listen to him ; and where they listened, they not infrequently came to believe. It was given to Christ, as it is sometimes given in a lesser degree to lesser men of genius, to coincide with a psychological moment. The world was turning uneasily in its sleep : it was losing its religion, but it still retained its art ; and it was given to Christ to reveal how truly the two were one.

There may still be many to whom it will seem

almost sacrilegious to suggest that art can have influenced the early spread of Christianity; but really such people altogether misunderstand the meaning and functions of art. They instinctively think of the Royal Academy Exhibition, and of atheistical painters, smoking horrid pipes, who work on Sundays, and of all that is anathema to the conventions and the middle-class mind. If they were told that the Gospels constituted a supreme work of art, they would be unaffectedly shocked. But art is not confined to painters; nor is it a trade. It is an expression of the soul; and the soul is the only part of us which is in continual contact, even when we are least aware of it, with the Spirit of God. A great artist is a man of genius whose soul is in his work, whatever that work may be. He works not for hire, but because nothing on earth can stop him from giving expression to what his soul feels. He may win battles and make and re-make states like Napoleon, or paint like Titian, or carve mere wood like Grinling Gibbons, or even be a tinker and burst into rhapsody like Bunyan. It is all one what outward expression his soul finds; he is inevitably a great artist. And had Christ, the greatest man of genius, been a sculptor or a poet, he would necessarily have been the greatest of sculptors or of poets. Because he took up none of the trades of this world he did not thereby cease to be an artist. He could not cease to be one; such a transformation is impossible. An artist can neither be made nor unmade. Christ's love for mankind led him to embark

upon the enormous undertaking of attempting to rescue it from its own follies ; and into this undertaking he poured his immeasurable soul. The scale on which he worked was at once minute and immense. No means were too small for him to employ ; but he wrought for all time. The result could not but have been beautiful and artistic ; for had it been otherwise there would have been no lasting result at all. After God, we know of nothing eternal but art and love ; and it takes a great artist and lover to make us see.

It is not suggested, of course, that Christ used his great power consciously. On the contrary, his is the true art that is artless—that is art because it can be nothing else. Because Christ was a beautiful man everything he did was beautiful ; and when he came to speak he clothed old truisms and new illustrations alike in such a shining garment of beauty, that they fell upon the ear and mind like new thoughts in a new tongue. People had not dreamed that their time-worn platitudes could be so truly beautiful or so beautifully expressed. In Christ's hands the familiar parable form of exposition became even to the Orientals as a new thing ; and one can understand how his stories of the prodigal son and of the slothful servant, and his likening of Heaven unto this and to that, must have struck upon the still sensitive, artistic, highly cultivated Greek mind with a sense of exquisite beauty and truth. In such as these there was nothing their over-keen sense of the

ludicrous could turn to ridicule. The vision of Christ must have seemed to them the very thing for which they had been reaching out their hands so long and so fruitlessly. From the beginning they had found the earth so beautiful that they had not supposed the beauty of Heaven could greatly exceed it ; and they had been unable to rise above the then universal conception of a half-human god. Yet by means only of this image with feet of clay they had indeed wrought wonders. They had fashioned a sort of conjoint Heaven and Earth, which for sheer intoxicating beauty of idea stands alone among the creations of the human mind. But in course of time they became dissatisfied with Zeus and his Olympian family. The vast black abyss of doubt yawned suddenly before their very feet : they felt that perhaps they had been utterly wrong ; that perhaps of all their gods and demigods they would find in the future state only Nemesis Adrastia and her furies waiting to strike down those who were ascending so joyously to meet, as they thought, the happier immortals. Or, again, perhaps there was no future state after all ; and simple unbelief were then the obvious end. . . . And then into this welter of conflicting hopes and fears, Christ came with a vision of Heaven that satisfied both their captious intellects and their harassed souls. He described to them a place of beauty in beautiful words. He told them of a God so powerful that to Him all things were possible ; and yet so close at hand, so gentle and loving, that they could come

to Him in little trials as in great, like children to a father. When he said to them, "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation : neither shall they say Lo here ! or Lo there ! for the Kingdom of God is within you :" the beauty of expression no less than the beauty and truth of thought must have gone deep into the minds of those readers of Plato and Socrates who found their later philosophers but poor aids to wisdom. He put before them all their vague aspirations with such clarity, fullness, and beauty, and illustrated his text with such a wealth of luminous metaphor and example, that they would have been no longer the descendants of the people of Homer had they remained unaffected. And behind all this, or within it, they felt the great driving power of his personal beauty and knowledge. "He spoke as one having authority." That which the practical Roman soldier saw by the light of his simple faith and his own worldly experience, these artistic and sensitive people saw no less clearly by the unaided light of their imaginations. They felt this instinctively to be the right thing. Even to their critical ears it rang true in every part. And so we see the beautiful but lifeless shell of Greek and Græco-Roman and Græco-Asiatic mythology crumbling and falling and vanishing "like wrecks of a dissolving dream" before the living beauty of Christ ; and decrepid Zeus and Apollo, Artemis and Hera, Pan and Faunus, even the harmless Tethys and Doris and Echo with all their charming sisterhood, shrinking away into the limbo of nursery tales and poets' dreams.

V

I have insisted upon the force with which the Greek mind in especial must have been struck by Christ's personality and vision in order to bring out once more the fact, now so generally forgotten, that in his day the Greek mind, far more than the Roman legionary, still ruled the world. The Gentiles of the New Testament were either more or less genuine Hellenes, Hellenized-Orientals or Romans ; and as for these last, who had explicitly taken the Hellenic East under their charge, they were out-Heroding Herod in their straining after things that were Greek. Their own conventional, unimaginative spirit might not be altered substantially by this influence, and among them the spread of Christianity may have been comparatively slow ; but a considerable portion of the educated class had about this time actually embraced a Hellenized form of the Jewish faith ; and when they found themselves, after all the sacrifices this involved, relegated to a position of unalterable religious inferiority to the Jew by birth, they were prepared to welcome gladly this new universalistic religion, introduced to them as it was by the approval of that nation whose fiat on intellectual questions was regarded as law. Debased though Greek art and culture had become, there was still enough of the old leaven within it to make it mightier than the sword ; and the conquests of Pompey only served to drive home the wedge Alexander had inserted in

the East so many generations earlier, and to open the way, along the same lines, for Christianity. It is significant that the first Seven Christian Churches, mentioned in the revelation of St. John, arose in seven cities, which had been in turn Oriental, Greek and Roman, along the great Roman road from Ephesus to Laodicea.

There can be no doubt that Christ realized the situation clearly. He could have had but the poorest opinion of contemporary Greek culture ; but he knew that the colonial Greeks retained far more of the spirit of their forefathers than the degenerate people of Athens and Corinth. He knew how, by this spirit, the languid intelligence of the Eastern world had been aroused, and how the reaction was spreading Westward again. He saw how forcibly, with his own artist's love of beauty, he could bring home to the very hearts of these Hellenized Gentiles the things he wished to teach. He may have hoped that the Greek influence would have helped him with his own people ; but here, or at any rate in Judea itself, he found that influence to be only superficial, and the radical bigotry of the race substantially unsoftened by it. For the time, Jerusalem and its neighbourhood seemed useless for his purpose. He turned his eyes further afield. Still clinging to the hope of working some good among his kindred, he saw, living about the Gennesareth lake, a centre of industry and commerce far removed from, and independent of Jerusalem and its factions, a cosmopolitan popu-

lation in every way better suited to his initial venture. The Jewish inhabitants of these townships had probably to some extent relinquished, or for the time abandoned all overt attempts to materialize, the hope of independence; they were too busy to brood persistently over their ills; and while they might curse the Gentile behind his back, they doubtless found him a good customer whom they could spoil in the legitimate way of business. Many of them, too, as we have seen, were fishermen; hardier and better fellows in every way than the town-bred fanatics of the interior. The Gentile population of this region, so far from any large centre of Roman authority, must then have been living in comparative amity with the Jews; while there was continuous current of human intercourse between the valley and the outer world. On the one hand merchants from Tyre and Sidon, Ptolomais and Cæsarea, found their way across the mountains into Capernaum or Tiberias; on the other the caravans of Damascus brought news of the great East beyond the desert, while the cultured life of the Decapolis lay always within sight and reach. We cannot wonder that from such centre the fame of Christ spread rapidly; or that there came to hear him great multitudes from Judea and Jerusalem, from Perea and the Decapolis, and from the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon.

What his further plans were we cannot know. But we cannot suppose that he originally intended to spend all his life in this region. We find him

taking considerable journeys abroad—into the “coasts” of the Decapolis, into Perea, into the Phœnician plain. Although no mention is made in the Gospels of his preaching in some of the greater Gentile cities, I think there can now be little doubt that he did do so. The objection that as an orthodox Jew he would not have entered these unclean precincts is unsound. He was not an orthodox Jew; and his mind was not of a calibre to be bound by any such doctrinal restrictions. It is quite likely that in the beginning of his teaching career he was careful to avoid crossing too openly certain Jewish prejudices, as any such action would have militated against his usefulness both with his people and with others; but probably these early travels into Gentile territories were the preludes to missionary work on a far larger scale which he projected for later years. In the meantime he was consolidating his position and extending his fame amid a people and country known to him from infancy and admirably adapted to his purpose.

His further plans, whatever they may have been, never matured. There came a day when a conviction was borne in upon him that his time on earth was short. The edifice he had originated and founded he would never see completed. There must have come to him then, as there came to him in his last hours, a doubt of its ever being completed without him. But to that far-seeing intelligence and courageous spirit such doubts were no more than breath upon a mirror—momentary

cloudings of its brightness which shrank and vanished even as they came. In his soul he knew how his words would travel after death into countries and among peoples then unknown : he saw them marching step by step with the legions along the Roman roads, crossing seas and mountains with the gulls and eagles, blowing with every wind into some dark crevice of apathy or barbarism. " Heaven and Earth," he said in some such moment of heroic insight, " Heaven and Earth shall pass away ; but my words shall not pass away."

CHAPTER IV

THE LAST DAYS

I

ON the Eastern slope of Olivet, about two miles from Jerusalem, the village of Bethany lay surrounded by oak and olive, almond and pomegranate trees. Hither Christ came to lodge, some few days at least, as it seems, before the feast of the Passover; a time when the pomegranate should have been in full blossom, making a splash of gorgeous colour on the lip of the steep and arid descent to Jericho. The capital itself, always overcrowded, must have been at such times of festival all but insufferable. The not too accurate Josephus avers that 2,565,000 persons kept the Passover during the governorship of Cestius, while he speaks of another 1,200,000 being shut up in the doomed city by the army of Titus in the year 70; and although these totals may seem apocryphal, there can be no doubt as to the great multitudes of the pious who came, regardless of trouble or privation, from all quarters of the Roman Empire to attend these thanksgivings, so that the extra-mural gardens

and plantations were filled with their animals and equipages and tents. In the very heart of such an unparalleled gathering Christ spent his last hours, amid the heat and dust and tumult of the capital ; and in these days there should be many who can appreciate his determination to pass his nights in the comparative rural quiet of Bethany, and who can in some sort share his feelings as in the cool of each evening he climbed wearily up the long slope of Olivet among the crowded small encampments of the pilgrims, to where, across the summit which still glowed in the sunset light, in the restful shadows of the further scarp his humble friends awaited his return.

But of the tenour of his deeper thoughts during these numbered journeys homeward we cannot guess. During the last few days of his life he seems to have been continually at work, teaching in the streets and in the Temple, confuting his accusers, gaining adherents in the heart of the enemy's camp ; yet amid circumstances so forbidding, under a shadow so imminent and final, that in mere weariness of spirit he must sometimes have thought the soil at which he laboured to be sand. The people, we read, heard him gladly ; but his followers cannot have been more than a drop in such an ocean. His time was so short ; and he had so much to do. He had long known he would not live through the Passover. To him the premonition seems to have come exceptionally early, but he was an exceptional man ; and even in its more limited

scale the phenomenon is not so uncommon that we need to marvel at it. Nelson's famous remark to Blackwood before going into action off Trafalgar is an instance of similar prescience which will occur to all. The thought of death itself would not trouble Christ ; indeed, there may have been times when he welcomed it ; but it must have added an element of ironic bitterness as well as sadness to his reflections upon the bigoted, devoted city and the great company of selfish enthusiasts, utterly heedless of his message, ignorant for the most part, it may be, of his very existence, fatuously following their blind guides to moral and material ruin. The demands of art are fulfilled even in the external facts of Christ's public career ; and the ingenuous chronicles of the earlier Gospels, after proceeding through a series of scenes of cumulative power, conclude with the dramatic picture of his ultimate days outlined against this vast background, so picturesque, so impressive, so overpowering at the moment, so futile in the result. His death, as he must have felt, was specifically ordained to be accomplished with every circumstance calculated to stamp it for ever upon human memory ; and it was in the consciousness of this that he had gone forward so calmly to a festival which in itself must have lost all significance in his eyes. Every morning, as the sun came up over the mountains of Moab across the Jordan, he looked down upon the valleys of Hinnom and Jehosophat, alive with tens of thousands of pilgrims rousing themselves for the

day, their bright robes flashing like blossoms among the olive leaves, their banners waving languidly, innumerable streamers of smoke ascending from their fires : he looked down also upon the fated city grouped upon its eminence, the gleam of its palaces paling before the brightness of the Temple : he heard from far and near the call of trumpets, the roll of drums, the clash of cymbals, the rumour of a thousand stringed instruments and the continual hum of a million voices ; a volume of barbaric sound rising and falling on the breeze, echoing among the walls and streets of the city, ebbing and flowing among the groves on the hillside. We picture him with a group of his followers halting involuntarily upon the summit to survey this remarkable panorama. Standing in the shadow of death, grudging the fleeting minutes of his life because there remained so much undone, scorned, misunderstood, betrayed and yet confident ; at any such moment he may well have been moved to utter his beautiful lament over the city : "Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. . . ! If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace ! but now they are hid from thine eyes. . . ."

Meanwhile, within the city, preparations were

going forward for the great festival. Pontius Pilate, fifth of the Roman governors, was there in person, maintaining indifferent order with the help of the best part of the Imperial legions stationed in the province. He had some time previously moved the military headquarters from Sebaste to the capital, in order to have a stronger force at this danger spot; and had come off rather badly in a quarrel which arose out of the introduction on this occasion of the idolatrous eagles and images of the Cæsar into the Holy City. Pilate, however, was not a man to be put down by a single rebuff. There were not wanting other occasions on which he crossed Jewish prejudices, and crossed them successfully. He seems to have been a capable soldier and administrator, hard and not too scrupulous, careless of any provincial sentiments which seemed to him fantastic, sufficiently zealous for the welfare of the Empire as a whole and of his province in particular, still more zealous, perhaps, for the favour of the Emperor. His vacillation and surrender in the case of Christ are so markedly opposed to all we know of his character that they are only to be explained either by some selfish motive, such as fear of giving his powerful enemies a handle of complaint in Rome; or by politico-military exigencies, induced by his situation with an altogether insufficient garrison in a hostile city flooded with hordes of fanatical and excited strangers. The importance of his decision was of course hidden

from him. The case must have appeared to him as one of quite moderate interest elevated into prominence by the circumstances of the time ; and his condonation of an injustice, the consciousness of which he was at no pains to hide, doubtless assumed a venial character in his eyes. He went to his grave in ignorance of the fire which he had lighted, and of the universal execration in which his own hapless memory was to be perpetuated. If he heard of the treachery of Judas, he not improbably condemned it in camp language : he could not know that posterity would couple the traitor's name with his ; that romances would be weaved about them both ; that it would be told of him that the Wandering Jew was his door-keeper and Iscariot his page.

Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, was likewise in Jerusalem for the Passover. There also, the head and forefront of the coming ceremonial, was Joseph Caiaphas, the Sadducee High Priest, the last subject of the many pontifical translations ordained for political reasons by the late procurator Gratus. There also sat the other seventy members of the Sanhedrin, before whom Christ was to be brought and by whom he was to be illegally condemned : men learned in arts and tongues, in magic and astrology, in physics and arithmetic ; professedly learned also in tenderness and compassion, being selected from fathers of children for that very purpose. But bigotry had long since eradicated these qualities from their hearts.

And so the inhabitants of the city and the numberless strangers within and without the gate awaited the event, doubtless with much preliminary riot and bloodshed, calling out of troops, scourging and fining by the Sanhedrin, polemical warfare between Pharisee and Sadducee. Pilate lay watching the factions from the fortress of Antonia, at the north-west corner of the Temple area, wherein he kept his reserve of troops; and from the vast palace of Herod, where Antipas now lodged, from the towers of Hippicus, Phasael, Mariamne and others about the walls, smaller detachments guarded the several quarters of the city. The Temple courts were thronged continually by worshippers from every quarter of the known world, many of whom perhaps had never seen the sacred building since their childhood, while others now saw it for the first time. The Levites were assembling in thousands to perform the multifarious tasks imposed upon them. The victims were selected and prepared against the hour of sacrifice. In every house the guest-chamber was swept and garnished for the feast. And in the dwelling of the High Priest, within the Temple precincts, Annas the ex-pontiff and Caiaphas his son-in-law and successor discussed with others of the hierarchy the question of how they might best dispose of the pernicious Galilean who had dared to denounce them to their faces at such a time.

So passed the last hours of that day of April, A.D. 30; A.U.C. 783. It is presumed that because

the Gospels make no specific mention of Christ's activities on this day he spent it in retirement at Bethany; but it is surely vain to rely implicitly upon the chronology of these narratives. They are largely ideal in their arrangement of the smaller incidents of the story. It seems more likely that Christ worked up to the last, although possibly he did not enter the city on this day. The end was very near now: his work on earth was almost done. The following day was the 8th of the Jewish month Nisan, the Feast of the Passover.

Done also, or about to be, was the work of Iscariot. While his master left the noisy crowds to pass his last night of freedom with his friends in Bethany, the traitor may have been chaffering with Caiaphas and his fellows. Ere the city gates were closed he may have settled matters with the captain of the Levites and the Roman subaltern, telling them how and where the Nazarene might most easily be apprehended, and that he whom he should kiss would be the man. While night wiped the last glow from the summit of Olivet and the cold East became peopled with stars, he may have been climbing among the dark olive groves with their restless population to spend one more night with the friend he had betrayed. We picture him entering that little circle in the leper's house, to meet the eye of the Master who knew all, with suave speech and inscrutable mien, but who can say with what thoughts raging in his brain! The Gospels tell us

little of Iscariot ; but he can have been no ordinary man, and his has been no ordinary fame.

II

The episode of the Last Supper is the true climax of the life of Christ. Such he evidently intended it to be. The scenes of his condemnation and death, far more vividly placed before us, are dominated by his personality and marked by circumstances peculiarly affecting and dramatic ; but he was, in fact, dead to the world and its injustice when he rose to meet his assailants in the garden. The Paschal feast provided the last and perhaps the most beautiful manifestation of his genius. Careless of the ordinary ritual of the festival, he seized upon this one feature, simple and beautiful in itself, the friendly breaking of bread together in thanksgiving for a great national deliverance, and fitted it to his own ends. " With desire," he said to his disciples, " I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer ;" but his purpose was twofold. He wished also to arm his followers for all time with a sacrament in memory of himself and his work. He cannot have failed to be aware of how this instrument would gain in value by dramatic contrast. Its serene simplicity seems to have been ordained as a foil to the tumult and colour and variety of the final scene ; and in character it stands quite alone. Its interest for humanity is neither theological nor historical, but personal.

We possess but the most fragmentary account of it. The long, uncharacteristic—one is inclined to feel almost egotistical—speeches put into Christ's mouth in the fourth Gospel are manifestly akin to those orations with which the ancient historians loved to credit their heroes : they reflect the attitude taken up by the school of thought to which the compiler belonged, a school whose conception of Christ demanded from him some definite and dogmatic assertion of his supernatural origin. They seem also to represent a personality utterly alien to the impression we gather from the earlier and more ingenuous sources ; which, notwithstanding their lack of detail, have succeeded in rendering for us the peculiar spirit of the meeting on the day of Passover.

The earlier part of this, the last completed day of Christ's life, he is indeed likely to have spent quietly in Bethany with his most intimate disciples. His period of labour was ended for ever. It is probable that few, if any, of the Gentile Christians had come up with him from Jericho, for their presence might have inflamed dangerously the passions of the fanatical gathering ; and he doubtless desired those of his Jewish followers who wished to observe the ordinances of the law on this exceptional occasion to be at liberty to do so. However they may have feared for his safety, none of those who parted from him that morning can have known that it was for the last time. The secret had been well kept : definite knowledge of the impending tragedy seems

to have been limited to the twelve ; and it may be doubted whether in their hearts they fully accepted their Master's assurance of its urgency. His life of late had been full of risks ; and the human mind, however familiar with wonders, is slow to abandon scepticism and hope. They may have remonstrated with him on his determination to hold the meal within the city, but he was not to be turned from it. Certain of them proceeded therefore to Jerusalem to prepare a guest-chamber ; and towards evening, unobserved as it would appear among the surging crowds in the streets, the others of the little company arrived at the house and sat down together in the "large upper chamber."

From the few incidents recorded it is difficult to reconstruct the scene. We see Christ, to whom the meeting meant so much, eating and talking quietly with his disciples : we seem to see that the majority of the latter could not at first apprehend how greatly it differed from ordinary festivals. More was required before they could clearly see and wholly believe. We like to think it was early in the evening that they engaged in that unedifying argument about precedence, which led Christ to rebuke the presumptuous apostle. "Simon, Simon," he said, "behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat ; but I have prayed for thee, that thy strength fail not. . . ." He reminded them all how they had continued with him in his temptations. So characteristic that it cannot be disregarded is the story in John of his

washing their feet, in order to impress upon them the fact that all were equal, that he that was greatest among them should be as the younger, and that he that was chief should serve. He reminded them gently of his own regal power and supreme capabilities and of how he had used them, in the words : "I am among you as he that serveth."

It may have been that these words and acts brought them to their senses and partially opened their eyes to the future. It cannot anyhow have been long before they were touched by the shadow. We picture them after this seated about that upper room, lighted by a flickering brass lamp or two, shamed of their trivial contentions and falling one by one into silence. We picture them listening abstractedly to the ceaseless roar of the city, but turning an ear quickly to the lattice as some fresh wave of clamour rolled along the narrow street outside : struck suddenly apprehensive, though not now only for themselves ; speaking again in low tones of Pilate and Antipas, of Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin ; recalling their master's warnings and the threats and hints and ugly portents of the previous days. We picture Christ looking from one to another with inscrutable eyes, gently and affectionately and, as we cannot but suppose, sadly. And then, as the meal had drawn to a close and the appointed hour was near, he bade them put aside these matters, and break bread and drink wine with him for the last time. "This do," he said simply, "in remembrance of me. . . . I shall

drink no more of the fruit of the vine until that day I drink it new in the Kingdom of God."

The traitor partook also of this simple act, the symbol of fellowship ; but although he might hide his feelings from his duller fellows, his mind and heart were an open book to his master. Considering the circumstances, however, it is difficult to believe that Christ expressly indicated his betrayer at this time. Such an exposure might have destroyed the latter without delaying the end ; it would inevitably have caused an uproar. The disciple who was so ready with his sword in the garden would not have hesitated to strike down Judas. We have no hint in the story of any such disturbance. It is more probable that perceiving intuitively how Iscariot would come to be branded so remarkably and for all time, Christ addressed him not by name, but none the less directly, in his final allocution : "Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. . . . The Son of Man goeth as it is written of him ; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed ! It had been good for that man if he had not been born !" The little gathering, naturally shocked at this denunciation, protested loudly. Each asked "Is it I ?" They received no answer then ; but when they had risen to their feet and were preparing to depart from the house, it may well be that the unhappy traitor, uncertain still whether he were detected, tortured by his doubts, summoned courage to draw Christ aside and ask him

once more : " Master, is it I ? " It may be also that Christ answered him in words very similar to those recorded : " Thou hast said. That thou doest, do quickly " ; and that Judas, unable to remain longer in his presence, urged on by his fate, aflame with conflicting passions, slipped out into the night, and ran headlong to where the posse of the Temple guard were already collecting for their business. Here, as elsewhere, the true order of events can only be surmised ; motive and act are alike obscure : we only know that the thing was done.

And now, when the others had sung a hymn together, they also went forth into the darkening city. Passing among the torch-lit, shouting crowds to one of the gates, doubtless permitted to remain open to a late hour on these occasions, they came presently to a certain familiar garden on the slope of Olivet. When they were within, Christ drew Peter, James, and John apart with him. Peter had again indulged in one of those ill-timed fits of self-assertion and boastfulness which, even in our scanty records, mark the man so plainly ; but we must suppose Christ to have considered these three best fitted to receive his final injunctions. They were not likely to forget the circumstances of that conversation. The dark hour, always suggestive, the disappearance of Iscariot, the solemnity of their Master's tone, must have indured them at last with a definite sense of approaching calamity. We imagine them peering about among the trees,

fidgeting with their weapons, adjuring Christ to withdraw before it was too late. It was already too late, as he well knew : the minutes of his freedom were swiftly dissolving ; even now Judas and his band were climbing the hillside. With sad irony he warned his vainglorious disciples that they would desert him before the night was gone ; and bidding them watch and pray for themselves, he went forward a few paces from them and fell upon his knees.

It is not likely that we really possess his prayer. It is not meet that we should. He must himself have desired to spend these last moments alone with God. Tradition had it that he was in agony, and in part this may be true ; true also it may be that he cried aloud at one time, so that his followers heard him. "Father, all things are possible unto Thee. . . . If Thou be willing, remove this cup from me ; nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done." As he reviewed his labour in this interminable field, he may have felt for a moment that he had toiled in vain. Knowing his disciples' weakness, and how one had already betrayed him, he felt perhaps that his coming desertion by the rest would be the prelude to their deserting his cause. He may have become conscious of his infinite loneliness among his fellow-men ; he may have thought how bitter it was to be too great to have a friend. He cannot but have thought of what might yet be done could he but live : of what noble ambitions gratified,

what noble progress made, what worlds as yet unconquered won by love. Great though he was he was still human ; but he was also too great for despondency to hold. We think of him thrusting aside all dreams, all vain regrets, all personal desires, to pray for wisdom and courage for his followers in the dissensions and troubles he foresaw ; to pray also for the man who had betrayed him, and for those who would destroy him. He may have uttered then the wish he was heard to murmur on the cross : " Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." We see him rising at the end to rejoin his comrades with that look in his face which he was not to lose in life—the radiance of soul of one whose earthly affairs are all despatched and who is utterly at peace with God and with himself ; the radiance which awed even Pilate, and which was to be reflected in the faces of a thousand martyrs of all creeds in whom his spirit lived again.

We are told that when he returned to Peter and the sons of Zebedee he found them fallen asleep. The story is almost incredible, unless we suppose them to have been exceedingly fatigued, and a far longer interval to have elapsed than the narrative suggests. We must accept this hypothesis ; for in the Synoptic Gospels the indictment is unanimous and express, and is marked by touches which we do not like to think are fabulous. Such is Christ's sad reproach to Peter : " What, could ye not watch

with me one hour. . . . The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Thrice, we read in Mark and Matthew, he came to them; and thrice he found them sleeping. "Sleep on now, and take your rest," he said sadly to them the last time; "it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."

There came the sound of voices, the trampling of feet, and the glare of torches among the olive leaves. The other disciples came running, some pulling at their weapons. "Rise," he said to the shamefaced three who had slept; "Rise, let us be going; behold, he is at hand that doth betray me;" and so went forward calmly to meet Judas and "the great multitude with swords and staves" who were crowding towards him through the grove.

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And here, for our purpose, the life of Christ may be said to end. It is not necessary to dwell again upon the last scenes. No paraphrase or interpretation can excel the vivid narrative in the Gospels. We meet there in person for the first time certain other noteworthy historical figures: Annas and Caiaphas; the hard, indifferent Pilate, typical of his race; the no less typical Græco-Oriental Antipas, scornful but curious. We have the picture of Peter warming himself by the fire (for in early spring the nights are cold on that high plateau) and denying his master with oaths; and that other characteristic one of Pilate publicly washing his hands to show

that he relinquished the responsibility which he had already failed to fasten upon Herod. We have the significant contrast between the Procurator's attitude and that of the frantic accusers. The drama is carried to its end in a succession of remarkable and painful scenes which are impressed indelibly upon the human memory, and which are perpetuated in endless variety in every branch of art. We have the sad catalogue of humiliation and insult inflicted upon Christ during those terrible hours ; but only a few brief sayings are recorded of him. These, however, no less by reason of their character than of the circumstances in which they were uttered, are among those we cherish most.

Even as his assailants laid hands upon him in the garden, he checked his followers' reprisal in words that are proverbial : "Suffer ye thus far ; put up thy sword again into its place ; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." And he added, in that fatalistic mood which seems to have grown upon him since his premonition of his death, and which, in this last resort, prevented him employing those powers which he possessed : "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels ? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be ?"

The news of his arrest and condemnation seems to have brought together many of his followers who were in the city, and who were prepared to face the hostility of the orthodox in order to see

him for the last time as he proceeded to execution: so that we read "there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him." And these he addressed in another immortal phrase: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. . . . For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" It was some one of these friends who offered him wine mingled with myrrh to deaden his nerves against the pain; but he refused to take it; and only for one moment, a moment, perhaps, of even greater mental than physical anguish, his suffering found vent in the cry: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

But he was at rest when the end came. The music of another world drowned for him the tumult of the crowd; the glory of its light dimmed the hot sunshine that beat upon the city walls; its voices called him home to peace and love. "Father," he cried, "into Thy hands I commend my spirit"; and so died.

EPILOGUE

WITH the death of Christ the hopes of his destroyers seemed momentarily justified. His followers scattered in consternation and fear. The movement was unorganized and headless. Nor was this all. The personal link between Jew and Gentile having snapped, the rivalries stilled in his presence became acute. Those Jews who up to the last had regarded him as the Messiah, claimed his resurrection to be a proof of his mission ; but they insisted that he was a leader for the Chosen people alone. They differed as a whole but little in points of doctrine from their orthodox compatriots: they now perhaps wilfully forgot the catholic aims of Christ ; and even his immediate disciples, now that his influence was removed, allowed their exclusive, anti-Gentile prejudices to revive. The Gentile converts, possibly in the minority, were threatened with exclusion ; and the Church of Christ, if not immediately destroyed, seemed brought to a standstill and in danger of absorption into Jewish orthodoxy.

But it was soon found that a spirit had been raised which neither fear, nor chaos, nor misunder-

standing could warp or repress. The light was not to be "cabined, cribbed, and confined" within the limits of a sect or nation. The Gentile element, more wide-minded and receptive than the Jewish, was not to be suppressed; nay, while the latter fell between two stools and rapidly lost all power in the new Church, the former as rapidly expanded and assumed control. Like the Jews, they came to accept Christ's reappearance after death as an assurance of his divinity; but more potent influences were the manifest truth and beauty of his inspiration and the impression he had made while living upon the thousands who had known him; influences which are not likely to be eradicated from the human mind. As his followers recovered from the shock of their loss, the movement which so lately had seemed moribund received a new impetus and renewed its old form. Twelve or thirteen years after the Passover tragedy they received the title of Christians. The older disciples who had known Christ were reinforced by a younger and more cosmopolitan generation; in particular by St. Paul, who, whatever we may think of his interpretation of his master's ideas, was a man of immense ability, vigour, sincerity and confidence. Even in his day the Christian communities grew and multiplied so fast that their original informality of worship was found to be incompatible with concord and progress; and presently a priesthood and a simple order of service were successively inaugurated. The first stage of the revolution was

now accomplished : the Church, different perhaps to that which Christ had dreamed of building, but still a noble instrument to forward his design, was now fairly embarked upon its remarkable career.

Within thirty years of his death his message was heard all over Europe. His Church was firmly established in Ephesus and Athens and Rome. It was spreading fast in Gaul, and may have reached England as early as the year 64, although it took no root there for another century. In the second century it was introduced into Ireland and Scotland. In the third and fourth centuries it stretched its hand beyond the limits of the Roman Empire and assumed strange disguises in Abyssinia and among the barbarians along the northern and eastern frontiers. The singleness of mind it had retained in adversity, it lost in prosperity : a number of schisms heralded those greater dissensions which were presently to shake the world. The Bishops of Africa were particularly troublesome ; and that country maintained its reputation for novelty by producing a profusion of heretical sects. Nor were these wanting in the other continents ; the Arian heresy, the Gnostic heresy, the singular inventions of the Manichæans, are perhaps the best known of the score or two which rose and fell during these turbulent generations. But a greater event overshadowed these quarrels. This was the adoption by Constantine, largely for political reasons, of Christianity as a State religion, followed by the baptism of that Emperor upon his death-bed in

the year 337. Paganism maintained the struggle a while longer, and even enjoyed under Julian a shadowy recrudescence of its former power ; but in fact its bolt was shot and its years were numbered. Zeus and his immortals had fled from Olympus before the winds of ridicule and scorn ; Pan, his syrinx mute, deserted of his flocks and nymphs, wandered disconsolate along the Arcadian hills. The Pythoness of Delphi had long ceased to draw the offerings of men : now the Sybillæ had passed in their turn into the shades of ignominy ; and Euroclydon called mournfully about the bleached white pillars of a thousand empty fanes and sought in vain the brazen vessels which of old received his whispered warnings in the groves of Dodona. The gods were dead ; and not all the eloquence of Symmachus, the conservatism of the Senate, or the blind affection of the vulgar, could call them back to life. In the fifth century, while the division of the Roman Empire split the Christian Church in twain, the last shreds of the fabric of Paganism melted away almost unobserved.

It is not to our purpose to trace the further growth of Christianity. Our concern has lain not with theology but with religion and history. It is well, however, that we should sometimes pause to consider the one in the light of the other. We are such children of habit that it is only by viewing the subject through another medium that we can appreciate the radical change Christ introduced into the world's thought. In these days of literary

prodigality and suggestion it is more difficult than it has ever been to break loose from tradition and authority, in spite of all our talk of the emancipation of the mind. An open mind is become in fact a strange thing; and the historic sense perhaps a stranger. When people talk glibly of years B.C., or years A.D., few stop to think of how vital was the parting of the ways for which these symbols stand, or of how profound must have been the revolution—philosophical and social, as well as religious—which can extend downwards, throughout the white races of mankind, to such trifles as the dates they scribble heedlessly upon the corners of their note-paper. It is at least interesting to reflect that but for Christ we might still lack a common pivotal year for our calendar; might still, since the pathway of historic time ends in a waste of darkness, be reduced to inaugurate our almanack with the alleged date of the founding of Rome or of London, with the birth of Alfred or the battle of Senlac. Such things are indeed trifles; but in a trifling age, when so much is taken for granted and ignorance and indifference are hall-marks of good form, they are possibly better calculated to induce reflection than the solemn enunciation of more vital instances.

For a better understanding of the state of affairs at the beginning of the Christian era the events of the Reformation provide a picturesque though strictly limited example. We see once more in those events a world sunk far in languor and corruption; and we

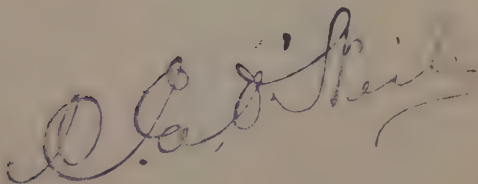
see how startling to such a world, how subversive of all the methods by which it had been guided for so many centuries, were the theories of Christ. But as regards the essential factors of his revolution, that initiated by Luther and Melancthon gives an altogether inadequate reflection. Theirs was in no true sense the part of innovators. They came with doctrines no less rigid and rage no less implacable than inspired those against whom they fought; equally with those they brought in their train intolerance and bigotry, the rack and the stake. The Papacy was a definite, palpable evil which they could assail to its face; but the ancient polytheisms, numerous as the sands of the sea, interwoven and allied one to the other, similar in fundamentals, were by their very nature, however decayed and absurd, a less vulnerable obstacle. To their destruction, as to their preservation, the world was indifferent. Like sands, indeed, they clogged the feet of the reformer; and many such a one before Christ had found them closing softly behind him, obliterating his track even as he cleared the way before, so that he sunk at length exhausted and overwhelmed in the immemorial drifts. Against this chimæra Christ in his turn advanced, alone, unhesitating, offering neither worldly penalties nor worldly benefits; bearing in his hands neither sword nor shield—only those simple truths over whose interpretation Kings and Popes, Anglicans and Catholics, Zwinglians and Anabaptists were to lash themselves into futile wrath so that the heavens rang with their

polemics and quivered in the haze of their sacrificial pyres.

It is extraordinary that Christ should have felt so certain that this would come to pass ; it is still more extraordinary that he should have been right : it is the most notable testimony to the living power of his teaching that it has been so. For the enthusiasm which beautifies even the sordid quarrels of sects is the outcome of an element unknown in religion before his time—an immutable belief in the essential being and kindness of God. It takes strange forms : it is responsible for selfishness and jealousy in communities ; but it is responsible also for a spirit of abiding trust and happiness in individuals. In the early days of the Church in Rome, the days of mad or tyrannical emperors, when even the pagan citizens wore long faces and walked in fear, when before the Christians there hung the definite probability of being dragged at any moment to the lions or hung in straw and oil as torches to light the evening walks of Nero—it is told of these Christians how they astonished all by their cheerful faces and their unaffected ease and gaiety of demeanour. The memory of Christ was indeed fresh in their minds ; but as we advance in point of time and see the Church disintegrating and apparently degenerating, we find the same peculiarity in its most inimical followers—in Protestants and Catholics, in the Jesuits who were flayed by the Sioux and in the martyrs of Port Royal. It is in these extreme cases that we particularly marvel at the happiness of spirit

which fills Christian men and women ; but that faculty is possessed in abundance by millions whose lot it is to do their duty unobtrusively and who may never be put to a supreme test. It is the legacy of Christ. We are perhaps paying him the highest of all tributes, when we admit, as we must admit, that since his day and directly through his agency, the sum of the world's happiness has been enormously increased.

The bad times are past ; but if we doubt sometimes whether the softer days may not kill the stronger virtues, we may be assured that the nobler spirit is not dead but only sleepeth and will return in due season. Churches may come and go, the glory of nations may become as ashes in the mouth, Cynthia from the skies may look placidly down upon a world as cold and waxen-pale and sterile as herself ; but the essential truth and hope of Christ's revelation will remain.



INDEX

- ABRAHAM, early wanderings of,
3, 4 ; religion of, 5, 39
- Abyssinia, 232
- Acre, 86
- Africa, bishops of, 232
- Alexander Janneus, 25, 58
- Alexander the Great, 17 *et seq.*,
86, 129 ; successors of, 19
- Alexandra, 25
- Alexandria, 19, 118
- Ambivius, Marcus, 69
- Amorites, 6
- Annas, 217, 227
- Antigonos, 19
- Antioch, 118
- Antiochus Epiphanes, 20, 22
et seq.
- Antiochus of Ascalon, 118
- Antiochus the Great, 20, 22
- Antipas, Herod, 63 *et seq.*, 216,
227
- Antipater, 25 *et seq.*
- Antonia, fortress of, 92, 217
- Antony, 28, 98
- Aramaic dialect, 14
- Archelais, 79
- Archelaus, Herod, 62 *et seq.*
- Aretas, 25
- Artaxerxes Ochus, 86
- Aristobulus I, 25
- Aristobulus II, 25 *et seq.*
- Arnold, Matthew, 190
- Ascalon, 118
- Asher, 6
- Asia, Greek influence in, 42 *et seq.*
- Assideans, 56
- Assyrians, 34
- Augustus, 60, 68, 98
- Auranitus, 62
- BAALBEK, 48
- Babylon, city of, 10, 11 ; cap-
ture of, 12
- Barbarians, 17
- Batanea, 62
- Bedouins, invasions of, 74 *et seq.*
- Benjamin, 6
- Bethany, 91, 211 *et seq.*
- Bethlehem of Judea, 89 ; of
Zebulun, 88
- Bethsaida, 83 ; Julias, 83
- Bible, contrast between Old and
New Testament, 171 *et seq.*
- Blackwood, 213
- Boadicea, 99

Bombay, 35
 Buddha, 125 *et seq.*
 Buddhism, 125 *et seq.*
 Buddhist theories as to Christ,
 130
 Bunyan, 106

CÆSAR, JULIUS, 97
 Cæsarea, 66; building of, 78
 et seq.
 Cæsarea Philippi, 62
 Caiaphas, 216 *et seq.*, 227
 Caligula, 63, 99
 Callirhoë, 90
 Cana, 88
 Canaan, 6
 Capernaum, 81, 83, 103
 Captivity, the, effect on Jews, 9
 et seq., 13 *et seq.*
 Carmel, 86
 Carrhæ, 3
 Carthage, 22
 Cestius, 211
 Chorazin, 83
 Christ, 55; story of the tribute
 money, 59; birth, 64; in the
 Synagogue, 77; birthplace,
 87; last journey, 89 *et seq.*;
 contemporaries, 98 *et seq.*;
 information as to early years,
 99; gifts, 101; apocryphal
 gospels, 102; silence of gos-
 pel writers as to early years,
 102; development of, 104
 et seq.; general idea of early
 life of, possibly erroneous,
 106 *et seq.*; attitude towards
 women, 109 *et seq.*; use of

the parable, 113 *et seq.*, 203;
 Occidental mind, 115; pos-
 sible Greek training, 116;
 training in Rabbinical schools,
 117; residence in Jerusalem,
 117; miracles, 119 *et seq.*;
 gift of healing, 121 *et seq.*;
 knowledge of Buddhist specu-
 lation and teaching, 127;
 possible journey in the East,
 128 *et seq.*; aims, 136; fore-
 sight, 136 *et seq.*; conception
 of the Kingdom of God, 139
et seq.; artistic value of this,
 148; charity, 152; view of
 evil, 153 *et seq.*; temptation
 of, 158; religious views, 161;
 sacred books, 162; view of
 social state and class distinc-
 tion, 163 *et seq.*; conservative
 attitude, 165; beauty, 170 *et*
seq.; influence on N.T.
 writers, 177; creative genius,
 178; view of imagination,
 178 *et seq.*; knowledge of his
 appearance, our lack of, 184
et seq.; mistaken treatment of
 his death, 187 *et seq.*; attitude
 of early Christians towards
 him, 188, 199; genius, 189
et seq.; great artist, 201 *et*
seq.; influence on Greek
 mind, 203 *et seq.*; further
 plans, 208; journeys, 209;
 preaching in Gentile cities,
 209; conviction of approach-
 ing death, 209, 212 *et seq.*;
 final days, 211; attitude to-

- wards Passover festival, 219 ;
last day, 220 *et seq.* ; last
sayings, 228 ; death, 229 ;
legacy, 237
- Christian Church, early impulse
of, 196 *et seq.* ; first seven
churches, 207 ; effect of
Christ's death on, and revival,
230 ; rapid growth, 231 ; in
Rome, 236
- Christian community, first, 64
- Christianity, two aspects of,
160 *et seq.*
- DAMASCUS, 80, 118
- Daniel, 12
- David, 7
- Day of Atonement, 95
- Dead Sea, 81, 89
- Decapolis, 51, 79 *et seq.*, 118
- Diaspora, 44, 51 *et seq.*
- Dio-Cæsarea, 88
- EGYPT, 34 *et seq.*, 37 *et seq.*
- Eusebius, 79
- Ezra, 9
- FELIX, 79
- Festus, 79
- Fountain of Elisha, 90
- Francis, St., 174
- GAD, 6
- Gadara, 81, 84, 118
- Galilee, 45, 62 ; lake of, 81 *et seq.*
- Gate-towers, 77 *et seq.*
- Gehenna, 14
- Gennesareth, lake of, 81 *et seq.* ;
district of, 83 *et seq.*, 207 *et seq.*
- Gentiles, Court of, 94 ; nationali-
ties of, 53, 206
- Gergesa (Gerasa), 84
- Gerizim, 24
- Gethsemane, 224
- Gomorrhah, 4
- Gospel, St. John, 99, 101, 199,
220
- Gospels, Apocryphal, 102
- Gospels, Synoptic, 102, 177, 185
- Græco-Syrian Monarchy, 19 *et
seq.*
- Gratus, Valerius, 69, 216
- Greece, 17 ; influence of, 19, 40
et seq., 114 *et seq.*, 206
- Guest-chamber, 217, 221
- HANNIBAL, 17
- Hebrew tongue, abandonment
of, 14
- Heresies, 232
- Hermon, 49, 85
- Herod Antipas, 63 *et seq.*, 216
- Herod Archelaus, 62 *et seq.*
- Herod, Philip, 62 *et seq.*
- Herod the Great, 28 ; death, 29,
90 ; will of, 60 *et seq.* ; cities
built by, 78
- Herodians, 58 *et seq.*
- Herodias, 63
- Herodotus, 10, 129
- High places, 13
- High Priest, 16, 70, 95
- Hinnom, 213
- Hippos, 81, 84
- Holy of Holies, 95
- Holy Place, 95
- Huleh, lake of, 83

Hyphasis, 127

Hyrchanus, John, 24

Hyrchanus II, 25 *et seq.*

IDUMEA, 24, 62

Isaiah, 9

Iscariot, Judas, 218, 223 *et seq.*

Israel, Kingdom of, 8 *et seq.*

JAIRUS, 165

Janneus, Alexander, 25

Jehoshaphat, valley of, 92, 213

Jericho, 79, 89 *et seq.*

Jerusalem, 6; captured by Nebuchadnezzar and Sennacherib, 9; rebuilt, 16; captured by Ptolemy, 20, and by Epiphanes, 21; siege by Hyrchanus, 25; captured by Pompey, 27; in the time of Christ, 92 *et seq.*; visitors at festival times, 211

Jew, Wandering, 216

Jews, a nomadic tribe, 4, 33; rise of, and patriarchal age, 5 *et seq.*; early conquests, 6; partition of kingdom, 8; extinction of monarchy and Babylonian captivity, 9 *et seq.*; release, 12 *et seq.*; effects of captivity, 13 *et seq.*; evils of centralization of worship, 14; return to Jerusalem, 16; under Persian rule, 16 *et seq.*; under Alexander and successors, 19 *et seq.*; rebellion against Antiochus Epiphanes, 21; Maccabee revolt, 23; second Monarchy, 24; early

environment, 30; in Babylonia, 36; in Egypt, 37; Jews of the dispersion (Diaspora), 51 *et seq.*; Greek influence on, 51; opposition to Herod's will, 61; revolt against census, 65; freedom of religion under Romans, 67; religious difficulties, 68; decadence, 200

Jews, Courts of, 94

John, St., Gospel according to, 99, 101, 199, 220

John the Baptist, 54, 63 *et seq.*, 104

Jordan, cities destroyed, 4; river, 81, 84, 89 *et seq.*

Josephus, 93, 211

Josiah, 14

Judah, 6; kingdom of, 8 *et seq.*

Judas Iscariot, 218, 223 *et seq.*

Judas the Galilean, 65

Judea, 45, 62, 66

Judges, 6

Julias, Bethsaida, 79, 83

Julius Cæsar, 97

KINGS, books of, 2, 8

LÆNAS, G. POPILIUS, 22

Laomedon, 19

Lebanon, 46, 49

Levi, 13

Levites, 217

Lincoln, A., 152

Lot, 4

Luther, 235

MACCABEES, 23 *et seq.*

Magdala, 81, 83

- Magi, 35 *et seq.*
 Manasseh, 6
 Man of Sorrows, fable of, 187
 et seq.
 Medes, 12
 Mediterranean, 46, 49
 Melancthon, 235
 Melchisedek, 39
 Meleager, 81, 118
 Mennipus, 81, 118
 Messianic Hope, 54 *et seq.*
 Mithridates, 26
 Moloch, 14
 Money-changers, 94
 Moses, laws of, 69, 75

 NABATEA, 25
 Nain, 88
 Naphthali, 6
 Nazareth, 87 *et seq.*, 103
 Nebuchadnezzar, 2, 86
 Nehemiah, 9
 Nelson, 213
 Nicholas of Damascus, 43

 OLIVET, 211
 Oriental imagination, 112 *et seq.*
 Origen, 79

 PAGANISM, extinction of, 233
 Palestine, 4; conquest by
 Alexander, 18; geography,
 &c., 30 *et seq.*; population,
 49 *et seq.*; lawlessness, 74;
 cities, 74 *et seq.*
 Palmyra, 13, 46
 Paneas, 63
 Parsees, 35

 Parthians, 24
 Passover, 211 *et seq.*
 Paul, St., 79, 129, 150, 231
 Pella, 81, 118
 Perea, 62
 Persians, 12, 16, 51
 Peter, 221, 224, 227
 Pharisees, 56 *et seq.*
 Philip Herod, 62 *et seq.*
 Philip of Macedonia, 22
 Philistines, 7
 Philo, 99
 Philodemus, 118
 Phœnicia, 86
 Pilate, Pontius, 68 *et seq.*, 215 *et*
 seq., 227
 Pliny the Elder, 99
 Pompey, 26 *et seq.*
 Procurator, status of, 66 *et seq.*
 Ptolemy of Damascus, 43
 Ptolemy Philopater, 20
 Ptolemy Soter, 19
 Ptolomais, 86
 Publicans, status of, 72 *et seq.*

 QUIRINIUS, census of, 65

 RAMESES, 47
 Reformation, the, 234 *et seq.*
 Rehoboam, 8
 Reuben, 6
 Roman Empire, rise of, 17, 21
 et seq.; Jews and Judaism
 under, 28, 52 *et seq.*, 58, 60 *et*
 seq., 206; under Augustus, 98;
 Greek influence upon, 206
 Rufus, Annius, 69

- SABINUS, 61
 Sadducees, 56 *et seq.*
 Samaria, 6, 24, 45, 62 ; town of, 78
 Samaritans, 16 ; legions of, 68
 Samuel, 7
 Sanctuary, the, 95
 Sanhedrin, 70 *et seq.*, 216
 Saul, 7
 Scaurus, Marcus, 26
 Scepticism in the Græco-Roman world, 134 *et seq.* ; in the nineteenth century, 120
 Scribes, origin of, 15 ; influence, 55 *et seq.*, 70 *et seq.* ; on local councils and Sanhedrin, 69 *et seq.*
 Scythopolis, 81, 118
 Sebaste (Samaria), 78
 Seleucus Nicator, 19
 Sellers of doves and lambs, 94, 192
 Seneca, 99
 Shalmanezzer, 86
 Sidon, 30, 86, 208
 Simon Zelotes, 65
 Sodom, 4
 Solomon, 7
 Supper, Last, 219 *et seq.*
 Symmachus, 233
 Synagogues, origin of, -15 ; uses of, 69, 72 ; services in, 76 *et seq.*
 TACITUS, 4
 Talmud, 60, 200
 Tarichæ, 84
 Temple, the, 7, 14 ; Pompey's visit, 27 ; Herod's rebuilding of, 78, 93 *et seq.* ; completion and destruction, 95
 Theodorus, 118
 Tiberias, 82 *et seq.* ; lake of, 81 *et seq.*
 Tiberius, 69, 98
 Tirzah, 8
 Titus, 95, 211
 Trachonitis, 62
 Tribes, twelve, 6
 Tyre, 30, 86, 208
 UR OF THE CHALDEES, 3
 VARUS, QUINTILIUS, 61
 Voltaire, 138, 197
 ZACCHEUS, 90, 163
 Zama, 22
 Zealots, 60, 65
 Zerubbabel, 13
 Zoroaster, 35 *et seq.*

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